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McGLUSKY THE GOLD-SEEKER

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McGLUSKY'S GREAT ADVENTURE

GINGER AND McGLUSKY

PRESIDENT McGLUSKY

THE ADVENTURES OF SIGNOR McGLUSKY

McGLUSKY THE GOLD SEEKER

RED HAWK

NUT BROWN MAID AND NUT BROWN MARE

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

McGLUSKY
THE GOLD-SEEKER

BY

A. G. HALES

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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DEDICATED TO

BOB PURVIS

The old pioneer of the Australian and African wilds, trail breaker, path finder, the man who blazes the track for lesser men to follow even now in the winter of his storm-tossed days—Cheerio, Bob, may this find you even in the wilds of Nigeria and remind you of the old days and

The Author
A. G. HALES

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CHAPTER I

A BONNY MAID

A ROUGH stone cottage, standing well back from a trail that stretched all the way from Mount Olive to the Crow's Nest, lifted its ugly, uncouth, shapeless mass in the full glare of an Australian summer's day and seemed to challenge the wilderness to deny its right to be where it was, as a vanguard of civilisation. The stones of which the house was built were all unhewn, ragged and untrimmed, just as they had been blasted out of some rocky hillside; the carpentry, as represented by the door and windows, was as primitive as the masonry; yet, rude as the dwelling was, it looked "homey," honest and hospitable. A wire fence ran round the homestead, and marked it off from the wilds. A few fowls strutted about, as if trying to convince themselves they liked the glaring heat, and in the shade of a few fruit-trees three or four dogs were killing time and avenging themselves upon the flies that tormented them.

The door opened, and Maida Lamarde came out and walked a few paces from the house, and pushing her sunbonnet a little back from her face, threw up one hand, and peered from under it along the western end of the trail. The dogs had risen as soon as the girl appeared, and with one accord moved in her direction,

as if drawn by a magnet. One, a bonny little fellow, half Irish terrier, half Yorkshire, looked in the sunlight like a gleaming ball of rough gold—a privileged animal this, to judge by the way he raised himself against the girl's dress and licked her hand. A brindle bull-bitch with a face ugly as a nightmare, waddled to the other side of the lass and challenged her attention, followed immediately by a snow-white bull-terrier of perfect symmetry, and it was plainly to be seen that between this latter pair there was little love lost. Maida Lamarde dropped her hand, and ceased to peer along the trail; she turned her eyes upon the dogs, and smiled as she patted first one head, then another, distributing her favours impartially. Instantly the brindle bull-dog attempted to convert itself into a section of a circus, frolicking about under the mistaken impression that it was acting gracefully. The girl laughed, and the merriment displayed a set of teeth as white as carded wool, and at the sound of her laughter, a big, fine-looking staghound that had remained in dignified reticence in the background, trotted forward and claimed her attention. Lifting himself on his hind legs, he placed his forepaws on the girl's shoulders, and attempted to caress her face with his red tongue. The Irish terrier, frantic with jealousy, made an assault on the staghound, and the lassie promptly snapped him up and held him in her arms, the other animals leaping round her. Cuddling the terrier close, the girl exclaimed—

"Buck, you wee fool, what are you trying to commit suicide for? Old Mack will eat you one of these days, he will sure."

Then she began to romp with the dogs, apparently oblivious of the heat of the weather.

A jolly happy-looking woman appeared in the doorway and stood smiling for a moment at the antics of the brindle bull-dog. Then she spoke, and her voice was like her face, happy and sweet—

"You'll certainly get a sunstroke one o' these fine days, Maidee." Then, changing her tone to a note of interrogation: "See nuthin' on th' track, girlie?"

"Nuthin' doin', Mum; Dad's later than usual."

"Hope those two colts he put in his team this trip ain't givin' him trouble, Maidee."

"Take more'n that to trouble Dad, Mum."

"He ain't often late; he's that punctual, I can most set our old clock by th' comin's an' goin's of Dad's team, girlie, an' if it ain't them colts that's delayin' him, what is it?"

"Dad's got six good horses in his waggon besides the two colts, Mum; p'raps he's broken an axle or somethin'; the track's rough comin' through th' gully between th' hills."

"Yes, Maidee, it's a nasty bit o' road, that; th' grade's so steep an' th' rains hev washed holes in between th' rock boulders; still there ain't many men can handle a team on a rough patch like Dad."

"There ain't none, not one," answered the young voice with such a note of conviction that the matron smiled broadly.

"You an' your daddy's a pair, girlie—no man in the world like him for you, an' no lass on earth like you f'r him; can't fail in nothin', you two, in each other's eyes."

"He never does fail," answered the girl with conviction, "an' I'll bet he whipped Jess Williams good an' hard this mornin', if he met him, an' he'd be most sure to meet Jess at the Two Crows Hotel, it's where they both water their horses at the junction of the new trail an' the old trail."

The woman's face turned pale.

"What should he want to whip Jess Williams f'r, girlie?"

"I dunno, Mum, only Dad said he would if he met him."

"Jess is a big, strong man, an' years younger than your daddy, girlie."

"Posh, that don't count; Dad said he'd whip him—an' he will."

The woman looked anxiously along the western trail, and the girl went to her and rubbed her smooth cheek lovingly against her mother's face, a trick she had learnt as a child, watching the foals rub their jaws against their dams.

"I'll throw the saddle on Mushroom, an' ride along the track a bit, Mum; p'raps I'll see Dad's waggon at the bend—he *is* late."

"Don't go too far, Maidee, your father don't like it, now there are so many strangers comin' along th' trail to th' gold rush."

"I'll take old Mack; he can run faster'n a horse can gallop, an' no man would touch my bridle rein whilst Mack's about."

"Take Binkie too, child." The woman indicated the brindle bull-dog as she spoke.

"No; Binkie's a terror, but she can't keep up with

a horse; her old bow-legs ain't made f'r runnin', Mum."

"Well, take White Wolf; she can run an' fight too."

"All right. You hold Buck, or he'll run his little heart out; he'd just follow me till he dropped dead."

Putting the Irish terrier into her mother's arms, Maida Lamarde went round the house with the quick, eager movements of perfect physical health. A brown filly standing in a stockyard, whinnied at sight of the girl. Speedily she adjusted bridle and saddle, and swung herself up with all the confidence of a life-time of practice. The filly was a thoroughbred, bought from one of the big horse and cattle stations where the raising of blood stock was a speciality, a station that had turned out the winner of more than one of Australia's classic races. Mushroom was well enough bred to have won the Melbourne Cup, and was her father's gift to her on her birthday, the filly representing his one great extravagance in a hard and thrifty life. He had saved for years to purchase this gift, and had denied himself many a little pleasure that the bushman loves. He had said to his wife: "The best ain't too good for our Maidee, and the best she shall have," and he kept his word, for no queen could have ridden a horse of purer blood, for Mushroom, in spite of her plebeian name, was every inch a lady. She might easily have been better groomed, for in the Australian bush folks set more store on fitness than upon appearances, but beneath her rather rough brown coat Mushroom's splendid muscles rippled like steel springs, and when she moved, she trod as daintily as a ballet dancer. Maida cantered past the house, down the front

yard, and out of the slip panel which her mother had let down. The staghound Mack and the white bull-terrier raced along with the filly, whilst the Irish terrier and the bull-dog struggled with Mrs. Lamarde in a vain attempt to join in the outing.

For a couple of miles the girl swung along easily, the filly under her moving as if made of whalebone, never a hoof-stroke jarring, no matter how rough the trail grew. She came to a bend in the track, and drawing rein, gazed steadily ahead. A small cloud of dust rose up a long way in advance; for a moment she seemed inclined to canter on and meet the waggon she felt certain was hidden by the rising dust, but remembering her mother's anxiety, she swung the filly round, after another long look down the track. She gave Mushroom her head, and the filly, whose racing blood had been roused by the two-mile canter, broke away in a swift rushing gallop.

"Come on, Mack—come on, White Wolf!"

The girl's clear young voice rang out challengingly, and the two dogs, who knew her in all her moods, stretched themselves out and raced the brown filly at the top of their speed for a quarter of a mile.

"Steady, old girl, or Mum will think there's something wrong. Steady; easy now."

Maida slowed the filly down to a gentle hand gallop, talking to her pet as bush folk so often do who have no neighbours to talk to. At the slip panel she cried:

"It's all right, Mum, Dad's waggon dust was lifting just by the old dry water-hole, when I was at the bend, and he seemed travelling faster than he generally does, judging by the move of the dust."

"All right, Maidee dear, I was silly to be anxious."

"I'll just ride around and look at our cattle, Mum, and bring in the two cows; they are sure to be near the clay pan, the water holds there and the grass is sweeter."

"Take the bull-dog with you, you won't be riding fast."

"No, Mum; Binkie ain't safe; if a steer turns and looks at her, she always wants to charge and pin it down by the muzzle."

She trotted her filly away in a direction opposite to that she had taken when she had gone in search of her father, and Mrs. Lamarde went inside the house to prepare for the teamster's return.

The country was all open, undulating plain, not a tree in sight in any direction; in the far distance the bare, barren Quondong hills upreared themselves, forbidding in their grim austerity, detested alike by cattle-men and prospectors, for neither grass nor minerals had been found there. On the plains a few cattle ranged, and a few breeding mares ran free. A humorous journalist who had once passed a few days there on his way to a gold rush, had described the spot as "half way between Mount Desolation and Hades," and most folk wondered why Joe Lamarde, the back-block teamster, had selected such a position as a homestead for his wife and bonny daughter, and Lamarde never enlightened them. He had taken up his selection, and had blasted the stone from the rocky hills for his dwelling, and had carted every bit of if and built the house where it stood, with the help of his wife, merely remarking to those who questioned him, "Well, the place suits me." What he found

there to suit him, beyond a spring of clear, fresh water, no one could even guess. Year by year he had added to his stock bought from his savings—just a small bunch of cattle, or a few brood mares, all of which, for the most part, looked after themselves, until Maida grew big enough to ride around them and look them over. The greater part of his time Lamarde carted goods by team from any place where a small mining rush broke out, and his waggon and team were known to all who had business on that long, desolate trail. The big station-owners through whose "runs" the track wound its way, employed Lamarde a good deal, for he was known as a trustworthy man, who never drank to excess, and never let his tongue run on other folks' business.

"A bad man to quarrel with," was the dictum of those who met him round the few watering places along his route, "never asks for more than his rights, and never accepts less; knows a good bit about mining, and a lot about breeding horses and cattle, and knows all there is to know about backblock teamster work; won't fight unless he has to, and won't leave off when he starts, until he's got what he started to fight for; has no religion, and less politics; only has one God, and her name is Maida, and don't you whisper that name above your breath, unless you want to lose it."

Now and again young stockmen riding afar would call at the homestead, and having seen the divinity of the place, would seek to prolong their visit, making a tired horse, or a personal attack of lumbago, the excuse. They mostly left hurriedly, and seldom returned, explaining to their cronies that Binkie, the brindle bull-dog's facial expression was a poet's dream com-

pared to old Joe Lamarde when he caught them looking at his daughter. One of the cattle men, Saul Goode by name, having become enmeshed by Maida's big eyes, sat best part of a week, night and day, manufacturing home-made poetry, for which he claimed a gift. He sent it to the lass, and she being heart-whole and full of frolic, read Saul's product to her father and mother one morning at the breakfast-table. A week later the boss on the cattle station where Saul worked, met the poet rounding up steers and opened his budget of news.

"Say, Saul, the men say you can make poetry."

Saul blushed.

"I can a few," he stammered.

"Ever made a long, long poem like *Paradise Lost*, Saul?"

"No-o, boss."

"Well, you start on one like that, an' make it in the saddle; make it about two hundred miles long, 'nd don't you stop to put in no commas or things like that; an' Saul, if you value y'r life, don't make it a halting verse; old Joe Lamarde's down at the wool-shed with a dirge you made for his daughter, an' he's got his fightin' face on. Now you ride f'r it; we ain't got no time f'r inquests on bush poets in th' shearin' season."

"C-co-u-ld-n't I say I meant th' poem f'r Binkie th' bull-dog, boss?"

"You could, Saul, but seein' you addressed it to 'Maida with th' hauntin' eyes,' I don't think th' explanation would help you any. What did you want to write that fool stuff about her 'honeycomb mouth'

for? What do you know about the taste of her mouth, eh?"

"N-othing, boss," confessed Saul.

"An' her 'wasp waist.'"

Saul swore picturesquely at this thrust.

"An' her 'bewitchin' lower leg'?"

"I never put that in, I said her—her ankle," snarled Saul.

"All th' same to every one except a blinkin' poet; it comes to th' same thing; I'm married, an' I know, Saul."

"Do—th' boys—on th' station know 'bout my—my pome, boss?"

"They do, Saul, an' they're gettin' ready to roast all of you that old Lamarde leaves unflayed."

"Boss——"

"Yes."

"Send my cheque on to Ballaroo, will you? I—I'm goin', an' I'm goin' now." And he went.

It was some time after she had parted with her mother at the slip panel that Maida rode Mushroom slowly inside the home paddock, driving a couple of milch cows in front of her; she looked for her father's waggon, expecting to see it in front of the house, but instead she saw a group of saddle hacks, and pack-horses, and her mother talking to a bunch of men dressed for the trail.

"Prospectors," she muttered; "where on earth did they spring from?"

Riding straight up to the group, she addressed her mother.

"Dad not come yet, Mum?"

"No, Maidee, and no sign of him; these prospectors came on to the main track below the forked trail, and they saw no sign of Dad's waggon."

The girl knitted her brows.

"That sounds bad to me, Mum; the forked trail cuts in on the main track fifteen miles from here; Dad ought to have passed that a good many hours ago."

A big, raw-boned man, evidently the leader of the party of prospectors, detached himself from the group and spoke like one used to giving orders, and it was noticeable that his words and voice had a pronounced Scottish tang.

"Lassie, y'r minnie ha' telt us she's afeared there's something wrang wi' her man; ye bide here wi' y'r minnie, and dinna fash; Ai'll ride th' trail wi' yin o' these buckies o' mine, till A find oot wha's wrang wi' y'r feyther."

"I'll ride with you, sir."

"It will be nicht afore long, lassie, an' th' lone trail's no place for a lass ta be on wi' a couple o' chance-met strangers."

Maida Lamarde looked straight into the speaker's grizzled face, and looked long. Then she said in tones as crisp and curt as his own—

"I know a man when I see one, sir; any girl would be safe with you riding on her bridle-hand. You're like Binkie; you carry your character in your face, sir."

The veteran looked at the brindle bull-dog that was fawning at his feet; then he said drily—

"A had no' noticed th' resemblance masel', lassie; air ye flatterin' me, or—or th' dawg?"

"I didn't mean looks—I meant character, sir; Bink couldn't do a mean thing if she tried."

The veteran turned from Maida, and addressing Mrs. Lamarde said—

"Yon's a wilful maid, A'm theenkin'; will ye no' bid her bide wi' ye? We can follow th' trail wi'oot her help."

"I'm going with or without them, Mum; good-bye. Dad may be lying hurt, and he'll want me."

She was away almost before the words reached them, and the staghound went with her. The leader of the prospectors just gave the flying figure one glance, then—

"Snowey, ye'll be ridin' wi' me; Ginger, you an' Butterfly an' th' Sergeant bide wi' th' dame."

Without a word, the prospector called Snowey, got into his saddle; he did not seem to hurry, but he was indescribably quick. Ginger cast a rueful glance along the trail at Maida's vanishing figure, and grumbled—

"It's you f'r th' luck av life, Snowey. Why did th' Auld Timer choose you f'r this job?"

"Dunno, kid, unless he thought my fatal beauty might come in useful later on."

The veteran got to saddle, and lifting his soft broad-brimmed hat to Mrs. Lamarde, said—

"Dame, we'll be movin'. My name's McGlusky; th' name may no' mean anything ta ye, but yince, long ago, afore A went soldierin', A was prospectin' in these parts—wumman, y'r dauchter's safe wi' us."

Mrs. Lamarde nodded her head and smiled, for, like her lass, she knew a man when she saw one.

"That girl can ride, Old Sportsman," commented Snowey after the first couple of miles had been passed.

"Aye, an' she's on something worth riding, ma son. A've been ha'in' a keek at her mare; dae ye notice th' length o' its stride! It's bred o' racin' stock, or A'm a parrarie flower."

"Shouldn't describe you in just them floral terms, McGlusky. Say, old pardner, how old are you?"

"Me, laddie? Weel, A left off countin' when A were forty, A dinna *feel* an hoor older than A did then, so ye may put tha' doon as ma age." His hard eyes twinkled as he looked at Snowey, then he continued with a sigh: "But p'raps ye've noticed signs o' approachin' dissolution creepin' ower ma, laddie? Maybe A'm feeble an' decrepit. A had no' noticed it masel'; eef A've been a burden ta ye young men on th' track since we landed in Australia fra' Italy, A'm full o' regrets f'r bein' a burden, an' ye've all been good; ye've none o' ye thrown ma weakness in ma teeth."

Snowey bent over his horse's neck and chuckled.

"As a human wreck, McGlusky, you shore take some beatin'. Two hours before you decided to camp last night, th' Sergeant asked Ginger if you ever got tired, an' Ginger said: 'Him tired? No; he ain't human; he's a blinkin' locomotive that's mislaid its label; he'd give th' wanderin' Jew three years' start in a trip round th' world, an' beat him on his head.'"

"For why should A get tired, buckie? Th' grub's good, th' bush air is fresh an' pure; A've a horse ta ride an' a blanket ta sleep on, an' th' good brown earth

is hard an' dry, no' like yon dommed mud an' slush in Flanders an' th' part o' France we fought in, an' no' like th' mire in th' marshes roon' Venice."

"I'm not kickin', Old Timer," drawled Snowey, a note of deep content in his voice, "Australia's good enough f'r me. England was a dream in th' spring, an' it wouldn't be bad in th' summer if they'd take a stove up an' warm their sun up a bit. Italy was gorgeous—in spots, an' the old East wasn't bad, but—Australia——" He sucked in his breath and let it whistle through his nostrils. "By the Lord, McGlusky, I love it, I love it. Why, if you rolled a cheese out here an' put life in it, this wind an' sun an' th' savage old earth would make a man of it in time."

For a moment McGlusky was taken aback at this outburst, for in all the years he had fought and marched, starved and striven alongside Snowey, he had never known him to let his heartstrings loose before, but he understood the native's almost fanatical love for and pride in his homeland. He reached out one bony hand and placed it on the young man's knee.

"Ye're richt, laddie, ye're richt; Australia's a gran' country, th' best on earth; it's no' a nursery f'r weaklin's, it's too dommed hard an' harsh f'r that."

Snowey was ashamed of his sudden outburst.

"It's not a bad old show, McGlusky; it gives hard knocks, but it gives big prizes—when you win."

"Th' truth's in y'r mooth, now, buckie; some o these fine days we'll get Britons oot here by th' ship-load, not scum, ye ken, but good stout-hearted stuff, th' sort who did th' fechtin' in th' trenches alongside us, an' we'll mak' old Australia hum, eh?"

Mile after mile they cantered with Maida fifty lengths ahead of them.

"She's a good bit o' stuff, that girl, never tires an' never hurries her horse," remarked Snowey after a long silence.

"Bush bred," was the laconic response.

When at last Maida reached the spot where the trail forked, she halted her mare and waited for the men to come to her side. The stars were out now, and the night wind was cool and refreshing.

"This is where you struck the main track to-day," she said curtly.

"Ye're richt; A ken it by th' bit boulder ower yonner," was McGlusky's reply.

The girl pointed with her whip hand.

"My father's over there somewhere, and I think he's hurt."

Her voice was firm, but had a deeper note than when she had first spoken.

"Maybe it's only a breakdoon o' his waggon, ma lass."

"No; if it had been, he would have sent his dog on home with a note tied to the collar; he's done that before."

"Has your father any enemy in particular, Miss?" questioned Snowey.

Maida told them of the man called Jess Williams.

"A'll ha' a word wi' Mister Williams, gin A find im, if he's done anything dirty, lassie."

"Sure thing," supplemented Snowey.

They were walking their horses to breathe them.

"I don't think it's Jess's work; he an' Dad don't

like each other, but if they met, it would be a fair fight, and—my Daddy would win."

"Got any notion concernin' th' gent who might ha' played a low-down game, Miss?"

"Yes."

Snowey noticed the harshness that came into the girlish voice as she answered his question.

"Got any objection to makin' a word picture o' th' gent, Miss?"

"Perhaps I'll tell you when we find Dad."

It was a good hour before they came upon the teamster's last camp. The waggon stood on the track; the horses were feeding in the grass some little distance away, but there was no sign of old Joe Lamarde.

McGlusky knelt and put his hands palm downwards in the ashes of the fire.

"Stone cold."

That was all he said, but something in his tones told Snowey that the veteran feared the worst.

"You stay here, Miss, and hold the horses; we don't want to mess up any tracks that we can follow at daylight; me an' my old pardner will scout around a bit on foot."

"Wait." Maida's voice was peremptory and commanding. "Wherever my Daddy is, his old waggon dog will be; you couldn't separate them." She put two of her fingers to her lips and whistled shrilly like a man, then hollowing her hand trumpet-fashion, she shouted, "Bob—Bob—Bob." The girl stood with one hand on the big staghound's collar. Suddenly she felt him quiver, and the animal started forward. "My dog hears something."

"Dinna let him slip." As he spoke, McGlusky unbuckled his belt and passed it through the stag-hound's collar. "Noo, lassie, awa' wi' him; he'll tak' us ta th' thing he heard; hark ta him, he's whinin'."

With a man on each side of her, Maida walked swiftly, pulled nearly off her feet by the big dog.

Far out on the plain they came across old Joe Lamarde, and crouching over his body was the waggon dog, Bob.

"Tear up some o' th' dry shrubs an' mak' a fire ta see by, Snowey."

Maida knelt by the body. A moment later they heard her voice.

"Dead—— Oh, Dad—Dad, my Daddy."

The waggon dog lifted its head feebly, and moaned. McGlusky put his hand down to feel the body of the teamster, and the dog made an effort to bite his wrist, just cutting the flesh with its fangs.

"Ye puir faithfu' beastie; A'm theenkin' y're no' far frae spent yer ainsel'," murmured McGlusky. "Quick wi' th' licht, Snowey." When the blaze came, the veteran looked into the face of the teamster, then knowing no help was possible there, he said: "Len' me a han' wi' th' puir tyke, laddie."

"Let him die with his master; I'd like my dog to go with me, if it was my endin', McGlusky."

"Th' tyke's duty is no' done yet, buckie, an' duty comes first, wi' man or dog."

Maida was lying by her dead father, the stern old face pillowed against her bosom. She made no sound,

she shed no tears, she just held the face she loved against her heart, whilst the two men attended to the nearly spent dog.

"All shot up," whispered Snowey. "Some one emptied a six-shooter into this poor tyke."

"We'll hae a job ta save th' beastie, an' he'll never walk again; his hin' quarters are paralysed, but if he lives to set eyes on th' man who shot his master he'll tell us, we'll read th' hate in his eyes."

"That won't be any evidence, McGlusky."

"Show me th' man, an' A'll hunt f'r th' clue."

"Where did the teamster get his?" whispered Snowey.

"Through th' back, laddie." A word that would not look well in print slipped through the young man's lips. "Amen ta that, ma son."

All night they sat there, taking it in turns to pour a little water, mixed with brandy, down the wounded dog's throat, and all night long the girl kept the head of her dead father against her bosom. When the dawn came, McGlusky took the staghound and circled the spot where the crime had been committed, but he found no trail; the hard, sunbaked earth contained no track, once or twice the staghound sniffed a bunch of grass, and growled, whilst the hair on his head bristled, but he failed to follow the scent, the wind had swept the spot for too many hours for it to hold. The veteran went back to Snowey.

"Yon wounded tyke is our only hope," he growled.

Troopers and black trackers who came to the scene later were of the same opinion; they could find not a

scrap of evidence toconnect any one with the crime, no tracks of man or horse—it was one of the many bush mysteries, and bade fair to remain unsolved.

McGlusky and his party had to remain for the inquest, and at the urgent request of Mrs. Lamarde, they camped on her selection. The widow was prostrated by the horror of her loss at first, but being a sensible, practical woman, rallied her energies to battle against fate, and the prospectors admired her for her courage, but Maida puzzled them all.

Sitting by their camp one evening, Ginger voiced his opinion of the lass.

"Sorr," he said in his soft Irish brogue, "Oi'm not knowin' what ter make av this girl Maida Lamarde at all, at all, faith, she's beyant me."

McGlusky peered at his youthful friend from under bent brows.

"Y're no' th' only yin."

"Oi've seen English girls, an' Italians, an' Egyptians, but she ain't like any av them; she looked bad enough when she rode home wid you, an' brung th' corpse av her daddy, but since then she's been goin' about her work as if havin' a father murdered was an everyday sort av a job."

Butterfly Brown, a big, loose-limbed Yankee, who was one of the party, supported Ginger's view of the maid.

"Guess you could tickle an oyster an' get more excitement out o' th' beast; she ain't like any Yankee girl I've ever swapped views with—smiles when you speak to her, an' gives you th' time o' day easy an' calm like, an' looks after th' stock as if th' old man had

retired on a pension an' left the place to her as a weddin' present. I calculate th' man who ever finds her heart will have ter use a hatpin."

"New kind of female to me," put in the prospector the others called "The Sergeant," a splendidly made man of five-and-twenty, with Englishman printed all over him. "She's so cool," he added, "she'd make an Iceland landscape shiver. Chatted with me this morning about her future plans, and didn't show enough emotion to disturb a babe."

"Emotion—her," scoffed Ginger, "she ain't got tears enough in her outfit ter make a postage stamp stick. Say, Snowey, is she a fair sample av y'r Australian girls?"

"Well," murmured Snowey, "I haven't made up my mind about her yet. I'd want ter know Maida Lamarde better'n I do now before I got into th' judgment seat an' said 'guilty' ter your charge. If she's heartless, she's damn heartless, that's all, an' if she ain't, she's a good bit of stuff, an' th' sort o' pal I'd like to have in time o' trouble."

"A pal?" Ginger's lip curled. "If all y'r auld Australian girls are like that wan, it's me f'r a wife over th' water."

"An' a dom lucky job f'r th' girls over here, ye red-headed exhibeetion o' congenital eediocy; ye ma theenk ye air fit ta wear th' mantle o' Solomon, buckie—A'm no' sayin' y're not, for A'd no' hurtit y'r feelin's f'r th' world, but A'm theenkin' th' hide o' an ass wud mak' ye a mair fittin' garment—an' th' same ta yersel', Butterfly, y're ugly enough ta ken better."

"Thanks, McGlusky," chuckled Butterfly Brown,

"you shore don't cloud your meanin' with any unnecessary frills."

"Oi'm glad Oi'm on friendly terms wid you, sorr," cooed Ginger, "yez might be sayin' somethin' unkind if Oi wasn't."

CHAPTER II

MAIDA TELLS MCGLUSKY A SECRET

They buried the teamster on his own selection, for there was no cemetery within driving distance, and it was McGlusky who made the coffin and railed in the grave. At midnight Snowey, who had risen from his blankets to give water to the wounded dog, glanced in the direction of the burial place, and fancying he saw something move near the teamster's resting-place, he picked up his revolver and moved very quietly in that direction.

"I've heard that murderers haunt the scenes of their crimes," he muttered, "if this one is doin' any hauntin', he's goin' ter stay here."

Soft of foot as a wild dog, he approached the grave unheard, and slipped through the railing. He could just make out a figure crouching over the dead man's resting-place in the dim starlight.

"Stand—an' throw y'r hands up."

As he spoke, Snowey's finger tightened on the trigger of his gun, and it clicked as it cocked.

Maida Lamarde rose up and lifted her hands.

"Who are you?"

Her voice was wonderfully steady.

"Guess I'm a fool prospector, Miss. I'm sorry. I saw somethin' move, an' I came along—that's all."

The girl came very close and looked into his face.

"You're Snowey?"

"Yes, Miss."

"I like you," the lass said simply, "you're solid an' you're sure."

"I'm right enough—in spots, Miss."

"Thank you for coming, Snowey. I came here to talk to Dad; we often sat here an' talked in the night-time when he came back from his trips, an'—an' I missed him." There was just one slight catch in her voice, no more; no tears, no sobs, no tremor in the strong hand she placed on the young adventurer's shoulder. A moment later she asked in the same even voice: "Do you think Bob will live?"

"Yes, th' dog will live, Miss, but he's shot through the loins; th' hind part of his body will be useless; he'll never move unless he drags himself along by his forepaws."

"I know—but his brain, his eyes, his memory will be clear, eh?"

"Sure thing."

"Snowey——"

"Yes, Miss."

"The man who shot my father will call here some day."

"If he does, the dog will know him."

"Yes, an' I wish you and your party were going to prospect round here; I'd like you or the big man McGlusky round the day the dog recognises the man who killed—him." She pointed to the grave as she spoke.

"Any of our party would do as well, Miss, they're all solid."

"Been together long?" she asked carelessly.

"Gallipoli—France—Italy—the whole show."

"You mean you were all through the war together?"

"Did a bit," was the laconic response.

"Surely that red-haired boy you call Ginger never went through all that?"

"Yes, Miss; nothin' better in our bunch than Ginger—when you know him."

"He looks so young, and his eyes are like a girl's; my Mum said the first time she saw him she wanted to mother him."

"All women want to coddle Ginger; I guess it's those blinkin' violet eyes and long lashes that do it."

"Has he a mother?"

"He's had about three hundred since I've known th' scut; all th' middle-aged one want to adopt him, an' he adopts all th' young ones; he's a woman magnet; he's only got to look at the landlady of a boarding-house to be invited in to a free lunch."

"I don't think he appeals to me."

"Wait till you hear him sing, and when he's singin' you watch McGlusky's face, then you'll know what the love of a man for a man can be, Miss."

"Does he return McGlusky's love?"

Snowey smiled. "You say something against th' Old Timer in Ginger's hearing, Miss, something real bad, an' you'll wonder you ever thought Ginger young an' innocent. You'll see a red-headed devil with flamin' eyes, and hear language that'll knock spots off a sunset f'r local colour."

Snowey was luring the girl away from the spot where her father lay, while he talked, and now having reached the house, he abruptly bade her good-night and returned to his blankets.

Soon after breakfast next morning McGlusky said to his party—

"Ma lads, A'm theenkin' we canna dae any good f'r th' twa wummin by remainin' here; we'd best be gettin' a move on; there's some likely lookin' country A ken o' aboot ninety miles further inland. A ken a mon who found gold prospects there afore A went tae th' wars."

"Faith, sorr, if he found gold as long ago as that, he's worked it all out by now."

"Ginger," replied McGlusky, "y'r bump o' weesdom is too much on one side o' y'r head ta be any use tae ye; ma old mate didna work wha' he found."

"Why th' devil didn't he then, sorr, if ut was any good?"

"Because he died o' typhoid fever before he had a chance, but he left a letter tellin' me aboot it."

"I wish this was prospecting country," said the Sergeant, "I'd like to hang round a bit, an' see if we could drop on the tracks of the cur who rubbed that old teamster out."

"We've got tae get a livin', ma laddie, an' if there was a chance o' gettin' it here, A'd no' quit, but de'il a chance dae A see of findin' gold or siller in these parts."

"The teamster didn't select this God-forsaken spot as a homestead f'r nothing," replied the Sergeant stubbornly.

"He selected it because it was a sort o' half-way place between everywhere; he could get loadin' f'r his team in maist any direction, an' put in a spell at home comin' and goin'," McGlusky explained.

The Sergeant shook his head.

"I'm new to Australia," said he, "and you're an old hand, but I don't believe that was the teamster's reasons."

"Ye may be richt, ye may be wrong, man, but if he had a reason he's taken it wi' him."

"Bet he hasn't, sorr—that girl knows."

"Ye dinna like th' lassie, Ginger?"

"Oi do not, sorr; she's too cold-blooded f'r me; but she knows why her father came here, an' if you found out who is her lover Oi'll bet me boots you'd be within shootin' distance av th' man that killed her father."

McGlusky moved impatiently.

"Get th' outfit ready f'r an early start, Snowey; A'll gang an' ha'e a crack wi' th' widow." He strode to the house and found Maida Lamarde alone. "A've come tae tell ye an' y'r minnie we're takin' th' road again, lass; we canna help ye here."

"Mother's in th' milking-shed—I'm sorry you're going."

"Sae are we all."

"Mum an' I are going to stay on here; we'll hire a man to drive the team, an' we'll run this selection; it don't cost much to keep two women in a place like this."

"Could ye no' dae better in one o' th' new townships?"

"I'm not thinkin' of that, I'm thinkin' of him." She pointed in the direction of the spot where her father lay.

"A'm theenkin' y're a good hater, lassie."

At McGlusky's words, the girl's iron control left her: she clenched her hands, her figure stiffened, her eyes blazed with sudden fury, all the colour left her face, and her clenched teeth gleamed through her slightly parted lips.

"Hate," she whispered, "hate? If you knew what my father was to me—— Mother's a good woman and she loved us both, but Dad"—she made a wide gesture with her hands—"Dad was my God, and—and I killed the thing I loved."

McGlusky recoiled from her.

"Ye're distraught, ma poor maid."

"I wish I were; madness would be a relief, a blessing; I'd thank God for madness at this moment, but I shall never go mad; I shall never be able to forget, never—never, and on earth or in heaven there was nothing I loved like him."

The back door opened, and Mrs. Lamarde entered with a milk-pail in her hand. McGlusky, shaken by the horror of what he had heard, more than he had ever been shaken by the desperate hazard of any battle-field, was glad of the interruption; he did not want to hear more; that bonny maid, so fresh and fair, with her dread tragedy hanging round and over her, frightened him. He made an incoherent excuse for the departure of his party to the widow, and went away.

"A'm ridin' on ahead; ye bring th' outfit an' dinna linger," was his curt command to Snowey. Then saddling

his hack with haste, he rode off, and as he rode he cast a glance at the teamster's grave and shuddered.

There were tears in the widow's eyes as she bade good-bye to those new friends of hers who had come into her life and were apparently going out of it as ships that pass each other at sea, but there were no tears from Maida; she had recovered from the emotion that had shaken her in McGlusky's presence. She looked at Ginger as if she could read every thought behind his eyes, and she smiled as she noticed that he just touched her hand and dropped it when saying good-bye, though he heartily returned her mother's embrace when the older woman kissed his freckled cheek and huskily commended him to the care of all good angels. She was cool and self-contained towards Butterfly Brown, but cordial to the good-looking English Sergeant. It was Snowey who had the last word with her. He had slipped away to give the wounded waggon dog a parting drink and pat on the head, for this man who had dealt out death ruthlessly to Turks, Germans and Austrians, was very tender with dogs or horses in trouble. As Snowey was rising from the animal's side, Maida came and stood near, and the dog lifted its eyes to her face in a strange, steady, questioning way, but showed no sign of pleasure. Snowey watched the meeting of the two pairs of eyes, and was fascinated by what he saw. Speaking of it later to McGlusky, he said: "By my soul, it made me shiver, Old Timer; the dog looked as a judge might look at a criminal in th' dock, and his steady unwinking gaze seemed to say 'Guilty, or not guilty,' an' her face, Old Sportsman, well, it looked—like—hell."

"Did she say anything, Snowey?"

"Yes, McGlusky, she said: 'Old Bob never more than half liked me, he was all for Dad, an' he was always a bit jealous of me, I think.'"

About an hour before sundown McGlusky rode off the track, taking to the open land on his right.

"Goin' ta look f'r a camp?" queried Ginger.

"A'm goin' ta look f'r watter."

"Tell me, sorr, how th' divil ye look f'r ut, when there's no rivers an' no wells, an' no landmarks? Oi'm bate entirely."

"Ye'll learn in time, if ye keep y'r eyes open an' y'r mouth shut, ma son."

"How will I learn if Oi keep me blinkin' mouth shut, sorr? Oi can't ask f'r information wid me ears, can Oi?"

"Mak' use o' y'r eyes in th' bush. Look yonner."

Ginger followed the pointing finger.

"Kangaroos," he said; then after a pause, "Emus, too."

"Yes, mannie, an' where ye see th' wild beasties feedin' in summer, ye can look f'r watter; ye'll no' always find it, but maistly ye will."

The pair jogged along over the plain, whilst the rest of the outfit kept to the track, and the veteran bushman and adventurer expounded the lore of the wilderness for his young comrade's benefit, teaching him many things in a terse phrase or two that might have cost him long months of harsh experience to find out, had he been prospecting alone, and Ginger, ex-waif of a British seaport slum, and ex-soldier of the great war, was an apt scholar, for his thirst for knowledge was without

limits. He put so many questions and wanted to have a reason for so many things, that at times he frayed the pioneer's temper to a frazzle, especially when Ginger mixed his crude ideas on theology with mundane matters, as he often did, for there was nothing in the heavens above or the earth beneath that Ginger did not want exact information on. Once he remarked—

"Sorr, ye say th' wisdom o' th' Creator is not ter be questioned."

"A say it, an' A mean it."

"An' ye say th' Creator's never wrong, sorr?"

McGlusky screwed himself partly round in his saddle, and looked at his interrogator, and Ginger pulled his horse a yard or so further away from his mentor, knowing that McGlusky's anger could be sudden and sharp.

"Weel, buckie, get on wi' y'r disqueesection, but mix it wi' reverence, or A'll mix ma answer w' a swing o' ma hand."

"Sorr, why did th' Creator make all these miles av salt-bush an' cover the earth with it? We've ridden over twenty miles av it to-day."

"Ta feed th' beasties on, ye daft loon."

"Is that so, sorr? Thin why will sheep eat salt-bush an' grow fat on ut, an' why will a horse refuse ut, an' starve?"

"A'm no' a horse, an' A canna tell."

"Sorr, why didn't th' Creator mix th' salt-bush properly so as *all* animals would ate ut?"

"A'm no' knowin', unless He wanted ta gie a fool somethin' ta ask questions aboot. Ginger, A said th' Creator's plans were parfect, but when A listen ta ye

bleatin' mile after mile, A'm theenkin' there air some things in life tha' never ocht ta ha' been born, or else drowned at birth."

After that they rode in silence for a bit, until McGlusky spied a clay-pan containing water; it was just a shallow depression in the surface of the plain, about a dozen yards in circumference, and the water was crystal clear.

"Is ut a spring, sorr?"

"No, ma son, it's just rainwater."

"How did it remain here while all the rest that fell disappeared, sorr?"

"Most o' th' soil is porous, an' water sinks in as fast as it falls, but yon is a patch o' clay, an' clay holds maist as well as cement after it's been baked by the sun; ye'll find yin here an' there on maist big plains, an' th' will hold until th' beasties drink it, or th' heat causes it tae evaporate; it'll no' sink in—it's th' weesdom o' th' Creator, laddie, it saves some o' th' wild game fra perishin'."

"Sorr——"

"Weel, mannie?"

"Why didn't th' Creator make more av thim clay-pans, an' save th' lot?"

"Ride, ye blastie, an' bring up the outfit," roared McGlusky, and Ginger rode, and as he went he chuckled, and his eyes were still dancing when he halted the outfit on the track.

"Been pullin' the Old Timer's leg some more?" queried Snowey. "You get a lot o' fun out o' that, kid, but he made a decent soldier out of a guttersnipe, an' he'll make a good bushman out o' you in time."

Ginger grinned.

"Shore thing he will," added the ex-Anzac Sharpshooter, "he's got a gift for turning rubbish he finds on the scrap-heap into somethin' useful."

"Pity you didn' stop back at th' teamster's selection an' waste y'r gift f'r payin' compliments on th' girl, Snowey."

"Cut th' girl out, kid."

"Brought a bruised an' bleedin' heart away wid you, eh?" jibed Ginger.

Snowey made no verbal reply; he just lifted his strange slaty grey eyes and let them rest on the Irish lad's face, and Ginger who knew the man he had so often fought beside, promptly found something that badly needed his attention amongst the pack-horses.

They camped that night by the clay-pan, for the prospector must camp where the night finds him, and chance his luck.

Just before dawn Snowey awoke the Sergeant.

"What's up, lad?"

The Englishman was on one elbow as he put the query.

"Kangaroos about here, an' I promised you some good shootin'; we'll have an hour, so look slippy."

The Sergeant tucked his rifle under his arm, and he and the greatest of the Anzac Sharpshooters moved out of camp silently, Snowey leading a hound in a leash. Soon a soft white light appeared in the east, and it spread like a curtain of gauze unrolling itself, till the bush was bathed in pearl grey shimmering glory.

"The sun won't be long followin' that, pal, so we'd best make the most of our time—the Old Timer hates a late start."

A bunch of kangaroos were feeding a few hundred yards away.

"You asked me to teach you how I learned to shoot, pal, well, if I ever learnt, this is how it happened. I'll start the hound after that bunch of kangaroos, an' when they break an' bolt, you pick your mark an' hit it on th' hop."

The ex-English soldier looked his incredulity.

"Pullin' my leg, eh, Snowey?"

"Think so? Why?"

"A kid could drop one of those big fellows at this distance, Snowey."

"Yes, while they're sittin', but you drop all you can when they begin to jump."

He slipped the hound as he spoke, and the nearly pure greyhound sped away at the top of its speed. A moment later the bunch of kangaroos shot away, splitting in all directions, each beast leaping with the peculiar up-and-down bound that makes it the hardest thing on earth for a rifleman to aim at.

The Sergeant picked his intended prey and fired.

"Missed."

There was a half-smile on Snowey's mouth as he spoke. Again and again the Sergeant fired until his magazine was empty, and he had hit nothing. Snowey snatched the rifle, jammed home a cartridge, and was about to fire, when a rifle just behind them cracked, and a kangaroo far out on the plain leapt high and fell flat. The pair of sportsmen turned and saw

McGlusky, his smoking rifle in his hand, a pipe in his teeth, a gleam of laughter in his eyes, and his old felt hat cocked up in front.

"Beat ye, Snowey," he called, "beat ye f'r yince."

There was a fat chuckle behind the old pioneer's tones, and he looked like a boy out on a frolic.

"You shore got my bird, Mac." Then Snowey let his eyes range afar. "Beat me for those two, th' red buck an' the blue doe movin' away by th' miamia clump."

McGlusky lifted his rifle quickly, but Snowey had sighted and fired before the veteran could touch his trigger. The blue doe fell headlong. McGlusky fired and missed, and again Snowey made his rifle speak and the big, red old man kangaroo pitched face forward.

"Y're no' canny," grumbled McGlusky. "Ye dinna shoot by sight, ye shoot by instinct."

"Had ter get my livin' at it f'r years before th' war, an' kangaroo scalps scarce pay f'r cartridges," was Snowey's only comment.

"I thought it was easy; they look near as big as a man," said the Sergeant.

"So does every one else till they try," smiled McGlusky. Then the two who had been bred to the bush explained to the Englishman the art of kangaroo shooting. "A'm tellin' ye nae lee when A say it's harder tae hit a flyin' doe on th' move than ta hit a pigeon on th' wing in a gale o' wind—A've tried both."

"Ye see," drawled Snowey, "a kangaroo travels on two legs; when you fire you've got to allow f'r th'

leap upwards an' th' drop downwards as well as f'r th' pace it's travellin' away from you, an' no two leaps of a kangaroo covers the same distance, they lengthen their leap or shorten it accordin' to th' balance of their bodies at the moment, or accordin' to th' nature o' th' ground they're travellin' over; downhill an' hard pressed an old man kangaroo will cover forty feet in a spring; an' beside this, the colour o' th' brutes is always th' same as th' bushes they get their livin' amongst—it's like shootin' at a ghost with no kind of a background to give you a horizon. When you're shootin' at four-footed things, they spring a level height an' an equal distance; by the time you're a dead kangaroo shot, you won't miss much that runs or flies or crawls."

"That's th' law an' th' gospels o' shootin', Sergeant," put in McGlusky. "Dinna be downhearted because ye missed th' morn; A wastit about a waggon load o' good cartridges afore A cud mak' sure o' ma supper wi' ma rifle; maybe ye'll be th' same, it's no' many Australians ha' th' gift o' 't like Snowey. A'm theenkin' *he* cud shoot wi' his feedin'-bottle before his minnie let him walk alone, but there's no' many like that."

Snowey had sauntered off to camp, and he and Butterfly Brown rode out on the plains and cut the long tails out of the fallen brutes.

"To-night," remarked McGlusky, "A'll show ye hoo tae mak' soup tha' will stick tae y'r ribs, an' mak' ye think ye cud tak' a fall oot o' Samson."

"Sorr," chirruped Ginger.

"Weel, laddie?"

"Why does a kangaroo have most of its strength in the tail av ut?" But that question McGlusky answered with the toe of his riding-boot.

For a few days the little party jogged on without incident of any importance; then when camping they were joined by two men who were riding camels. There was not much water in the clay-pan by which they had off-saddled, just about enough for them and their horses for the night, and a little over for the horses in the morning, and sufficient to fill their canvas bags with the needful supply for the following day. McGlusky explained the situation to the two camel-men, adding—

"A'm no' a hog, an' A ken th' law o' th' bush. Y're welcome tae fill y'r watter-bags f'r y'r ain use, but ye canna ha'e watter f'r y'r camels, they'd mop up th' lot, an' what they didna drink they'd foul."

The camel-men were rough-looking customers, and carried themselves like persons who were in the habit of having things very much their own way.

"Did you put this water here, Scotty?" demanded one.

McGlusky lifted his eyebrows in mild surprise.

"A dinna remember daein' it."

"Didn't happen ter scoop out this clay-pan so as it 'd catch an' hold th' rain, did you?"

"Not unless A did it in ma sleep."

"Well, don't try to run th' rule over us; we're not greenhorns; the water is as much ours as yours."

"Th' unwritten law o' th' bush must ha' been altered since I went on ma travels," answered McGlusky meekly.

"There's no law in the bush written or unwritten, an' we don't stand for no bush lawyers either."

"Hec, mon, y're goin' agin natur', th' birds o' th' air an' th' wild beasties ha' laws; air ye lower than them?"

The newcomers laughed, and began to unsaddle their camels. Ginger was fondling a pick-handle.

"Why does th' Auld Timer stand f'r their cheek?" he snarled.

"Oh, shade yourself under a bush, an' leave th' old sport alone," admonished Snowey.

Butterfly, sprawling at his ease amid the salt-bush, emphatically seconded Snowey.

"I ain't good at arithmetic, Ginger, but I opine it's about a million bull-ant bites to a mosquito blister th' old cock-bird can ruffle along without you markin' out his line o' route. Sew y'r capacious mouth up."

The Sergeant said nothing; he was waiting, and watching to learn the ways of the bush.

McGlusky had resumed his task of stitching a break in some of the pack-harness, on which he had been employed when the newcomers arrived. A more peaceful-looking elderly prospector it would have been hard to find. Snowey apparently took no interest in the proceedings at all. Ginger was the only resentful-looking person in the vicinity.

Having stripped their camels, the two strangers led them by their nose lines towards the water. McGlusky rose and sauntered after them, cutting a pipe of tobacco from a plug as he walked. At the edge of the clay-pan, before the animals could dip their muzzles into the water, the veteran with a sweep of his arm, cut first one nose line, then the other, and set both beasts

free, then with a resounding thump of his fist on each carcase, he started the camels off over the plain. If the two strangers had ever been more surprised in their lives, their careers could not have been uneventful. One of the two rapidly undid his leather belt, and grasped it with the buckle end swinging.

"Ye've been in th' army, buckie." McGlusky's voice was almost a coo as he made this remark. Without waiting for an answer, he continued: "A ken it by th' way ye han'le y'r belt; it's no' a bad weapon, a belt wi' a buckle on th' end o' it, A've used it masel'."

The stranger swung his belt and sprang forward. Instantly McGlusky shot his long left leg outward and upward, and the toe of his boot caught the rushing man in the solar plexus. He dropped both hands and sat down violently.

"Maybe," remarked Mac judicially, "ye've never heard o' savate. A learnt it o' th' French soldiers. It's boxin' wi' y'r boots," he explained to the fallen man's comrade, "A've seen Frenchmen who cud kick a fly off a man's nose an' no' bring blood. A'm no' sic an expert as that, but gin ye dinna buckle on y'r belt, A'll dae ma best ta shift some o' y'r face."

"What did you cut our camels loose for?"

"Dae ye no' ken? Weel, weel, y're slow on th' uptake. A let 'em loose ta fin' watter f'r themsel's. A used ta travel wi' camels masel', an' A ken weel they can smell watter f'r miles; there's sure ta be anither clay-pan somewhere wi'in five miles or so, an' they'll fin' it."

"We may have to tramp all night before we catch them, they're not hobbled."

"A'm theenkin' that's no' unlikely, an' a long tramp

gies a mon a gran' chance f'r reflection; maybe ye'll remember next time tha' th' law o' th' bush never changes. Ye mistook us f'r safties, an', buckies, there is no' yin o' ma party tha' cud na mak' a meal off either o' ye. A've seen y'r sort too often not ta ken y'r weight; y're no' *bad* men y're just a pair o' four flushers, an' ye've gotten a lesson."

"If I had my gun——" blustered one, but he stopped short as he met the veteran's gaze.

"That gent askin' f'r his gun?" drawled Snowey, who had sauntered across.

"He said somethin' o' th' kind, Snowey."

"I'll get it f'r him, McGlusky."

"Bring mine wi' it, laddie."

"Is—that—Snowey of the old Anzacs, Snowey o' Gallipoli?" gasped the man who had expressed a longing for his gun.

"It is, an' yon red-headed buckie is his pal Ginger."

"And—you're—McGlusky?"

"A am—McGlusky the peacemaker."

"Come on, Darby, or—or we'll never find our camels."

"Dinna hurry," murmured McGlusky, "they may be miles away."

"They are, an' so'll we be in ten minutes, unless there's something wrong with our legs. Come on, Darby," and the pair began to devour space in a manner which set Butterfly chuckling.

"What do yez call thim sort, sorr?" demanded Ginger.

"You'll meet things like that wherever diggers an' prospectors gather, ma son; their sort don't work, they

move from one minin' rush to another an' 'jump' claims. They mostly have some dirty lawyer buckie wi' a bit o' money behind 'em, an' he fights the cases in th' courts f'r them. Where ye see two o' them, ye can bet there's a gang, an' when they 'jump' a good claim they have plenty o' witnesses f'r th' court business ready to perjure themsel's ta th' hilt."

"Do they often win their cases?" asked the Sergeant.

"When it gets ta court business, they often do, buckie; very often a greenhorn will divide a good claim wi' them rather than face th' trouble an' expense o' th' courts, because th' jumpers' lawyer always tries ta get th' case sent on ta th' supreme court in one o' th' big cities."

"Why, sorr?"

"Because tha' kind o' lawyer always works wi' some blackguard firm o' legal robbers in a city, an' they can break a prospector wi' expenses."

"Sorr, Oi thought yez said th' bush life was clean."

"So it is, Ginger, but all who come ta th' bush ain't."

Ginger scratched his head and ruminated for a bit, then: "Sorr," said he, "is that a parable, or—or somethin' ter clean boots wid? Oi can't get th' grip ay ut."

The English Sergeant also seemed puzzled.

"Tell me, McClusky, what's the use of hunting for a good gold claim if the jumpers can get in on you like that?"

"A didn't say they cud get in on ma."

"What do you do, then, if they jump a claim of yours?"

The big man pulled meditatively at his pipe. Then: "Ask Snowey," was all he said.

The Sergeant did so, and Snowey merely pointed to a pick-handle with the toe of his boot, and yawned behind his hand.

"Beat 'em up?" queried the Sergeant.

"That's about it," was Snowey's laconic explanation.

"Glory be!" exulted Ginger. "Oi can see some hivenly times loomin' in th' distance."

"A'm goin' ta turn in noo," commented McGlusky, "but before A dae, A'll gie ye a wee bittie o' advice, since y're new ta th' prospectin' game. Never gang ta law wi' a jumper, never argue th' point wi' him when he or his gang come near y'r pegs; th' moment ye admit th' jumper's right ta argue, ye gie him a peg ta hang a case on, an' that lets in th' lawyer an' lets out your claim. Tak' a pick-handle, an' dinna threaten—use it."

"Won't jumpers fight, sorr?"

"Not often, ma mannie. Ye see, ye've th' law on y'r side; ye air fechtin' ta defend y'r property, an' that's lawfu' th' world over; they air fechtin' ta steal, an' if they kill it's murder, an' they'll no' often reesk it."

"If a jumper lets out me vital spark, sorr, wid a pick-handle, Oi'm thinkin' ut won't matter much ter me then what th' law does to him after."

"Th' law's a gran' theeng ta ha'e on y'r side, laddie," crooned the veteran, "after ye've made use o' th' pick-han'le, it—it helps ye ower th' inquest, an' it puts weight in y'r arm durin' th' trouble; th' man who fechts wi' th' fear o' a rope before his eyes only fechts wi' half his heart in his job."

CHAPTER III

ON THE GOLD-RUSH

The advent of the pair of camel-men set McGlusky's quick brain working. He knew every type of man whom gold drew into the wilds; his life of action and observation had taught him to discriminate between types.

"We'd better keep oor ears pricked, Snowey," he remarked, as the party jogged along in the saddle.

"Faith, an' Oi'm thinkin' we won't gain much by that," commented Ginger.

"Y're verra wise, mannie, maybe ye'll no' object ta enlighten us on y'r reasons; th' Delphic oracles were no' in it wi' you for reasons."

Ginger was too used to this kind of banter to wax wrathful.

"What's th' use av prickin' y'r ears when there's no wan illuminatin' our darkness wid their conversation? We hardly iver see a soul, an' them we do see have mighty little ter say: they ask you where you've come from, an' you ask them th' same; they ask about food an' water f'r th' horses, an' you put th' same questions, an'—an' that's about all."

"Bushmen don't talk much, buckie, an' it's from what they don't say that ye maistly learn most."

"Meanin' what, sorr?"

"Weel, it's this way: A'm takin' ye ta a bit o' country where A believe there's good gold; if A blethered aboot it, A'd have fifty prospectors on ma track, an' that would mean fifty times th' competition we will ha' if we gang as we are, an' it's th' same wi' maist men who follow this game."

"You think, sorr, those two camel-men were on your trail?"

"A dae not, for A've kept ma mooth sewn up, but they are trailin' some one who has a scent, some one who has found gold country, an' A'm goin' ta watch out f'r signs; if there's a 'rush' on, we'll need ta be quick on oor pins if we want any o' th' pickin's; they're jackals, those two, an' they have means o' findin' out when a 'strike o' gold' is made."

"If good gold has been located in these parts, kid," explained Snowey, "why, you'll see somethin' worth seein'; men will come along from every point o' the compass, an' come in a hurry, hard, resolute, determined men, crazy with gold fever, who will travel for a week without sleepin' or eatin' worth mentionin', an' they'll live on enough water to wet a honey bee's feet. You've seen th' Anzacs when they're fightin', well, kid, they are a band of angels in war to what they are when th' gold-fever gets hold of 'em."

The English Sergeant laughed.

"Then a gold-rush isn't my idea of heaven, Snowey."

"If it is," drawled the famous rifle-shot, "then you like a heaven tough enough to fry in."

"How do th' prospectors find out when a rush is on, an' where it is?"

"Ginger, y'r thirst f'r information beats a salt-plain's

thirst f'r rain. All A can tell ye is they *do* find out, an' they come on foot, on horses, on camels; they come in buckboards, an' they come in waggons, an' on bikes; they'll be comin' in aeroplanes soon, A've no doubt about that. A prospector mad wi' th' gold-lust wad come by telephone if th' blinkin' wires were down an' he could squeeze inta th' metal. It's just plumb craziness, an' nothing can stop it, or cure it."

"That's true, Old Timer, an,' Ginger, you ask how do the prospectors know—well, do you remember how we used ter watch one vulture comin' through th' air after a fight? First there'd be just one, lookin' like a speck in th' sky, then away on th' horizon another an' another, until th' air was full o' them."

"To hell wid thim auld vultures. Oi remember them, they came from every old direction at once, an' they all followed th' ringleader to th' right spot, an'—an' got busy."

"Well, that's how it is with prospectors an' a new gold-rush; I believe they scent it, or feel it in th' air." Then Snowey dropped his voice. "Look at McGlusky now—he knows, yes, I tell you, he knows there's a rush on not far away; he says he suspects those two camel-men, but I've been watchin' him the last two days an' I know th' signs. Look how he carries his head, like a horse listenin' to th' guns; see his eyes, why, they're fightin' mad; see how he fidgets all th' time in th' saddle, that ain't like him, boys, an' you watch him, an' you'll see him sniff th' wind."

"He can't smell gold, Snowey."

"Sure thing, he can't, but he'll smell horses an' camels, an' men; th' wind carries fine dust, an' dust

carries th' stink of camps with it. When th' right time comes, he'll sense th' rush an' th' direction, an' then he'll cease ter be a man, he'll be a tornado in trousers, an' he'll go over or through anything or anybody, an', Ginger, don't you start asking him why or why not—then. He'll drop his orders like a whip-lash, an' all we've got ter do is to jump an' keep on th' jump, for he'll work us an' th' horses till we drop, but he'll be in with th' first o' th' gang that starts ter peg out claims; if th' horses drop, he'll finish on foot, but he'll get there; his pride in himself as a prospector won't let him fail, an'—boys, I sooner be shot than fail him."

Ginger grinned until the freckles chased each other all over his face.

"Och, I belave in gold-madness now; Oi've seen ye fight, an' Oi've marched an' baked an' froze wid ye, Snowey; but, by th' whiskers av Mahomet, ut's th' first time Oi've heard yez make a speech."

A shamefaced sort of smile greeted this jibe, and instantly the Sharpshooter's face was in its old-time repose; the gold-light left his eyes, the tense alertness departed from his figure, and he drooped in the saddle, the same old, imperturbable Snowey with his mask on, easy, careless, indifferent.

"You shore do love to score off your pals, son," said Butterfly to Ginger.

"He don't give me much chanct ter score off him, but, Butterfly, have yez noticed a change in Snowey?"

"Since when?"

"Since he met the teamster's daughter, Maida Lamarde."

"Nothing to call on th' doctor about, son."

"Thin, ye undesarnin' Yank, ye've not been makin' good use av y'r eyes. Our old pal Snowey ain't what he was before them days: you watch him, he's got somethin' on his mind. Oi've seen something behind them eyes av his like as if he'd had a bad nightmare an' couldn't shake it off."

"Fade out," snapped Butterfly, "you're a dime novel, an' if Snowey hears you he'll stop your circulation. Anyway, who are you ter go liftin' up the windows of a pal's soul an' peepin' into th' unswep' corners?"

"Me life's a misfit," growled the Irish imp; "if Oi ax questions, th' Auld Timer jumps on me, if Oi use me great powers av deduction yerself miscalls me. Oi'd swap places wid a mummy, an' gain on th' deal."

All that day McGlusky was strangely restless; he kept turning in the saddle, as if he expected to see some one coming along the track behind him, or he would lean over his horse's neck, and peer keenly ahead; every now and again he stood in his stirrups and gazed searchingly to right and left. It was the same when they camped; he could not keep still, something fretted him.

"Boys," he snapped, as they off-saddled, and pulled off the pack, "don' make y'r hobbles long th' nicht; A dinna want oor beasties to stray far; water them well, and hobble 'em short."

"Gold-bug bitin' him," whispered Butterfly, "he's got a hunch there'll be somethin' doin' before long."

At about midnight the veteran roused the camp.

"Laddies, it's on—listen."

He threw himself full length amid the salt-bush, and

placed an ear to the ground. All the others did the same, except Snowey; he rose with his bridle on his arm, for he had slept with it coiled loosely, ready for any emergency, and as the others listened he slipped quickly away in the starlight after his horse; getting to it, he took off the hobbles, slipped on the bridle, jumped on its bare back, and rounded up all the horses of the outfit and drove them to camp, which caused McGlusky to remark to the others—

"Gin ye catch yon buckie makin' a miss-cue in an emergency, ye'll ha' whiskers growin' on y'r teeth; he was no hatched in an incubator."

The listening group could make out nothing definite, only a confused sound of moving horses, or it might be cattle.

"On wi' saddles and packs."

There was no mistaking those tones; a born leader of men was speaking; not one officer in a thousand knows how to give orders, but the old pioneer did, and the men in the outfit were all soldiers of long service. In an instant they were moving, and it was noticeable that Ginger never voiced a remark and none moved faster than he. Saddles were tossed on to riding hacks, packs were on the backs of the pack animals, and girths were buckled magically quickly, and everything was ready for the start by the time the vanguard of the "rush" came abreast of them.

At first glance, it looked like a routed army on the run. There was very little noise; now and again a man's voice was heard cursing some animal; occasionally a dog barked. There were camel-men and men on horses, mule teams, horse teams and footmen, vehicles

of every kind and condition. A light waggon drawn by eight good mules broke down badly; the men in charge of that party gave a hasty glance at the damage, and saw that it was irreparable; no time was wasted in vain lamentation; the mules were taken out, packs were improvised on the spot, the mules were laden with as much as they could carry, the rest of the loading was left in the derelict waggon to take its chance; the mules and the men went on. A dozen such incidents happened within half an hour. If a horse or a mule fell and was injured, a friendly bullet or a blow from the blunt end of an axe, put it out of its misery; if it was only partly disabled, its gear was torn off and flung by the track; the beast was headed out on to the big plain; if it lived —well, it lived, though its owner would in all probability never see it again; if it perished—well, it was a gold-rush.

For a time McGlusky kept his little band near their former camp, saying—

"We'll dae no good rushin' on inta th' night wi'oot an inklin' o' where we air aimin' ta go. Maybe when daylight comes A'll see some man A ken, an' fin' oot what's on."

But the crowd engulfed him, and would have overrun him and his party, had he not moved with the human stream, so he gave the order to move.

"Come on, buckies, but dinna get separatit; stick close ta me. This is a gran' rush, an' not one in ten kens mair than we dae; th' real destination will leak out later, then it will be merry hell an' th' de'il tak' th' hin'most"

The four closed up round their pack-horses, and the veteran led them, and in this formation they joined the stampede.

The dawn found them at a small township, and there they found several other mobs of men and animals assembled, whilst others were pouring in from nearly every point of the compass.

"Some one must have struck it rich, partner, or th' news has travelled; this is no storekeepers' rush."

"You've said it, Snowey."

"What's a storekeepers' rush, sorr?"

McGlusky turned impatiently away, but the Sharpshooter gave Ginger the desired information.

"A storekeepers' rush, son, is a fake find, got up by storekeepers who want to clear out their stock o' goods. They spread th' news an' follow th' crowds with loaded waggons, and sell their stuff at fancy prices. Now have you got on to that?"

"Faith, Oi have."

"Well, digest it, an' don't ask th' Old Sport any more conundrums—he ain't dispensin' general information f'r greenhorns at present—he's busy, so will you be directly; this is a tough crowd, lots of bush loafers an' larrikins here as well as diggers."

McGlusky, who had been mingling with the mob, came back to his outfit.

"We'll ride oot a bit on ta th' plain an' find water f'r our beasties; we'll get none here; they're sellin' th' little they have in th' township at five shillin's a gallon."

Snowey smiled.

"The old game, eh?"

McGlusky gave a grunt of disgust, and nodded assent.

"Any beer in the township, Old Timer? I could do with a drop."

"A wee drappie left, Sergeant—five shillin's f'r a sma' bottle o' Bass, an' whusky twenty-five a bottle."

"It's me f'r temperance," drawled Butterfly, "them prices convert me plumb teetotal; I'm a member of the anti-alcohol league from now on—till prices drop."

The veteran led his party well out into the salt-bush until he struck water.

"Feed an' water th' beasties; one of you watch th' gear, two stay with th' horses while they snatch th' grass, an' all of you watch out, there's goin' ta be no end of horse-lootin' directly; me and Snowey will ride back an' get th' strength o' things. See ta it no one rushes this camp; if a bunch o' footmen come loafin' round, dinna let them get ta close quarters."

The two who understood the ways of gold-rushes rode off.

"I'll stand by the gear, you, Ginger and Butterfly, watch the horses."

"All serene, Sergeant."

With a hunk of bread and bacon in his fist, the Irish lad strolled near his Yankee friend.

"You shore have an amazin' gift f'r plantin' victuals, kid."

"This is an emergency ration, Butterfly." When the food had disappeared, the Irish lad said wheedlingly, "Oi'll toss you f'r two fags, Butterfly."

"Got any to pay if you lose?"

"At prisint me tobacco larder's out av stock, but, ye skinflint Yank, Oi'll have oceans av fags."

"When?"

"Oh, come off av ut—when?—why, when Oi find me old gold-claim that's waitin' f'r me beyant. Come on and be a sport—— Toss!"

Butterfly, who could never refuse Ginger anything, handed him his packet of fags. Ginger selected one with great care and placed it behind his ear, and lit another.

"What's th' one behind y'r ear for, kid?"

"Och, that wan? That's ter remember ye by, Yank. Oi might fergit one, but two will live in me memory."

The good-natured lump of a man gave his tormentor a playful taste of his boot, and chased Ginger to capture what remained of the packet. They were full of their pranks, when a shrill whistle caused them to wheel and look in the Sergeant's direction. The Englishman was standing with the saddles and packs in a circle round him; a group of men on foot wer coming towards him.

"Wonder if those chaps are just mooseying about, or——"

"Or what, Yank?"

"Or are they goin' ter make things a bit interestin'?"

"Shall Oi go an' see? Th' Sergeant's all on his lonesome."

"Stay where you are; our orders are to remain with the horses, an' I suspicion that Britisher can keep his end up."

"Him?" scoffed Ginger. "He's just dyin' f'r a chance ter show McGlusky what he's made of; a scrap all on

his lonesome will plaze him more'n a lock av y'r hair plazes a girl at a boardin'-house."

The little mob of footmen came nearer; they walked through the salt-bush with that peculiar swing of the leg that always characterises men accustomed to big spaces covered by low bushes; townsmen would have been stumbling every few yards. The Sergeant bent over his pack-saddle, and when he straightened up he was very quietly buckling on a broad leather belt of Canadian frontier pattern; two heavy guns dangled by his thighs when he had finished. The group of men halted, and one of them, affecting a bantering laugh, called out—

"Hello, mate! Startin' a circus up this way?"

A chorus of guffaws greeted this sally.

"Starting nothin'," answered the Sergeant. "Just keepin' guard over this camp while my mates are away—an' I mean to guard it."

"'Fraid it will run away, p'raps."

"It ain't goin' to run in your direction if it does."

"Don't you be too fresh, young fellow; you're no bushman, you're a new chum."

"Quite sure?"

"Quite. Why, you smell of salt-water yet."

"If I'm new I'll get over that—in time."

"Only new chums wear a belt full o' guns in dis gountry," cried another of the mob, who spoke with the thick voice of a foreigner. "Over here," he continued, "we don' wear guns in our belds; we wear 'em on our watch-chains for charms, see?"

"Hello, Fritzy," retorted the Sergeant, "think I've met your sort before."

"Oh, haf you? Where?"

"Round about Neuve Chapelle, Verdun, an' other places. The last time I saw fellows like you, they were doin' a hop step an' jump back to the Rhine; they didn't wear guns, though—they had thrown 'em away."

"Oh, cut the war out; this is a gold-rush, mister," shouted some one in the crowd.

"All right, let it rush; can't rush too soon or too hard to please me," chuckled the Sergeant.

"Some one lifted our horses last night," cried the man who had first spoken.

"Too bad of 'em," sneered the Sergeant. "You must be new chums at the game to let 'em."

"I'm goin' to find 'em," snarled the fellow, who had "bush tough" written all over him.

"Well, your horses ain't in my saddle-bags, and you ain't goin' to look there for them."

"We'll go and have a look at those horses, though."

"Have a good look at the two men who are with them before you meddle with the horses."

As he gave this piece of advice, a very wide grin disturbed the Britisher's good-looking features.

"Look as if you'd had good news from home," jeered a tough.

"I shall have good news to send home if you touch those animals."

As the bunch of men came towards him Butterfly Brown laid himself down and began to carve his name on the warm earth with a penknife. Ginger sat on his heels and pelted his comrade with tufts he broke from the salt-bush.

The gang came and looked the horses over, and one

of them made a note of the brands on the animals in a pocket-book. Having done this, he replaced the book in his breeches pocket, and winked at his colleagues, and Ginger heard him remark: "That will do the trick any old time."

"I've seen you ridin' that brown gelding hundreds of times; I'd swear to that in any old court o' law," was the answer to the speech from a runt of a fellow, who looked as if he had lived in a saddle.

The brown gelding in question happened to be Ginger's own property, and a favourite. His heart did not go out to the two thieves.

"That grey mare o' yours, McGinty, looks a bit tuckered up to *me*," said a rascal, as he eyed Butterfly Brown's riding hack.

"Oh, she's as good as new. I'll fix her in less than a week," remarked the party referred to as McGinty.

Ginger and his comrade said nothing; they were waiting on events.

The looters drew off and had a short confab; then one detached himself from his fellows and came and stood over the queer pair who still went on with their harmless occupation, as if there was not a stranger within leagues of them. The looter, who looked like a backblock storekeeper or butcher on the down grade, gave himself as pompous an air as possible.

"Look here, you young fellers——"

Neither of the two adventurers obeyed this command: Butterfly continued to carve with his knife and Ginger kept on pelting him.

The looter tried again, but he might as well have talked to a ham, for all the response he got. He tried

several times more, and got very red in the face. Nothing else happened. Butterfly's ugly face was as solemn as the grave; Ginger's wore a vacuous grin, which made him look the descendant of a long line of imbeciles.

The rest of the gang came round, and then Ginger suddenly turned the whites of his eyes round until his eyes looked like old parchment, and sitting there on his heels, he sang *The Blind Boy*. A voice as pure and sweet as his had never mingled with the whispers the wind made amid the swaying miles of quivering salt-bush. A more non-plussed set of scoundrels never existed than the ring of ruffians.

"Say," said one, touching Butterfly with his boot, "are you balmy? Where did you get him?" indicating Ginger.

Butterfly made a clucking noise with his tongue, then moved his fingers in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet.

"I've shore seen some rummy outfits on gold-rushes," whispered a horse-thief, "but this beats the lot."

He came round the other side near Ginger, and standing between that young man and the American, gave the Yank a not too gentle taste of his boot. Instantly Ginger dropped forward on his hands and knees, and bit the fellow in the calf of his leg; then he barked like a dog, alternating the barks with growls. The gang jumped back, and the man who had been bitten cursed volubly.

"Now you've done it, Mister."

Butterfly had risen, and his ugly face looked preternaturally solemn as he spoke.

"Done what, you blinkin' dumb showman?"

"You've shore set him off; he had hydrophobia in England."

This was too much for the gang; they knew they had been hoaxed all along, and they grew nasty.

"We'll cure his hydrophobia, as we've cured your deaf-and-dumb game, you—you horse-thief."

It was the fellow who had taken the brands of the horses who spoke.

"Come off it; they are our horses; what kids' talk are you givin' us?" Butterfly gave his belt a hitch as he spoke.

"I'm a justice of the peace, and these men claim the horses you are minding."

The man who looked like a storekeeper was now doing the talking, and the American at once realised that the gang knew how to do a dirty job thoroughly.

"Of course they're our horses," said the rascal who had copied the brands, producing his note-book. "You're a real legal justice o' th' peace, Willoughby, look at this note-book, read the brands of our lost horses in it, and then look them animals over an' you'll see they're ours. These chaps want a suit o' tar an' feathers, that's bush law."

Then Ginger exploded.

"Get on wid it, then, ye dirty pack, you an' y'r tar an' feathers, you an' th' horses ye never had."

The fellow who had described himself as a justice of the peace waved his hand for silence.

"Perhaps these young men have been imposed upon; they may have purchased these horses, not knowing that they had been stolen; if they hand them over without any trouble, we'll say no more about it, but

there are plenty here who can swear whose horses they are."

Ginger lifted his hat and bowed like a prince.

"Oi'm thankin' yez, sorr, on behalf av me mate an' meself. Ye'll be sparin' wid that same tar an' feathers yez spoke av?"

"If you hand the horses over—yes."

"We can't do that, sorr, even to a justice av th' peace, because we're only mindin' 'em f'r th' real owners —an' here they come."

As he spoke, the Irish lad indicated two horsemen who were galloping towards them like a storm. The gang followed Ginger's indicating fingers with their eyes, and began to shift uneasily.

"Who are these men?"

"Wait till they arrive an' ax 'em."

There was a fat chuckle in Ginger's voice which the gang did not fail to notice.

The Sergeant had also seen the two approaching horsemen, for he waved an arm to them, and at once came striding towards Ginger and Butterfly. Snowey and McClusky arrived on the scene before the Sergeant. Jumping from the saddle, the Old Timer glared at the gang.

"Wha's this? Wha's wrang here?"

Ginger told him.

"Man," growled McGlusky, "ye ma thank y'r gods there's a big gold-rush on this minute, or A'd deal roughly wi' ye."

As he spoke, he hurled his massive right hand with terrible force into the J.P.'s face, and jumped on him with both feet when he fell. The Sergeant, using one

of his big revolvers as a club, felled the person who had taken the brands, whilst Butterfly and Ginger eased their feelings on the bodies of those of the gang most adjacent, as the Irish lad expressed it. Snowey did not join the fray, he was busy taking the hobbles off the animals that had been in dispute; he knew his services would not be required for the handling of such a set of scallywags, and he knew also that time was precious.

"Never mind pounding that brute," he shouted to the Sergeant, who was beating up a scoundrel he had caught. "Come an' lend a hand with the horses—the rush is on."

McGlusky had already gone to the spot where the gear lay, and stood with a pack-saddle balanced in his hands. They rushed the horses down to him, and without a word saddles and packs were buckled on. McGlusky, grim of mouth, with scowling brows, leapt to his saddle, and rode south-west, and the rest followed him.

"Where are we headin' for?" asked Ginger, after a couple of hours' hard riding.

Snowey jerked his head in the grim leader's direction.

"He knows—I don't, and I'm not fool enough to ask. All I know is we've got to beat some of th' smartest men in Australia, and we'll do it if we follow him."

"Oi don't see any one ter bate. We're all on our lonesomes."

"Sure thing, th' Old Timer got a tip from some one, an' he's takin' a line of his own."

McGlusky never paused in his fierce ride, except

when he came to a clay-pan with water in it. Then he would leap down and snap out: "Drink th' beasties," and as soon as this was done, he was in the saddle and away again. He never vouchsafed a word to his men concerning his plans; he was a leader who led, and brooked no questions or interference.

Sundown found them at the foot of a forbidding range of barren hills. The old pioneer halted them with a swift motion of his whip hand.

"Thanks be ter Mary, we've struck camp at last; Oi'm near roasted, an' dog tired."

But Ginger's joy was short-lived.

"Lead y'r beasties up yon hill; maybe we'll find water an' feed in yin o' th' gullies on th' ither side o' th' first line o' hills."

He was moving forward, bridle over his arm, as he gave his command, and the Sergeant was at his heels, and the rest went in Indian file. Stumbling over boulders, tripping, and often falling on loose rock, they went up and clambered down, only to climb again, for at each gully McGlusky, after a swift survey, had said: "Dry as a dust heap—march," and they marched.

Panting like a dog, with his tongue out, on the top of an ironstone hill Ginger gasped—

"Is—this—a gold-rush, Snowey?"

"A bit of it."

"Oi'm agin th' accumulation av riches after this then —a contented mind f'r me."

"Go and tell *him* you want ter quit."

The ex-Anzac Sharpshooter smiled as he heard the profanity bubble out of Ginger at the taunt; he had merely used the jibe as a spur.

They found a gully with water in its bottom and sweet grass at last.

"Off saddle."

"Listen to th' auld divil, Butterfly, he's as imparious as Pharaoh orderin' his blinkin' host."

"Good man to follow, kid."

"Don't Oi know ut, an' don't Oi love him f'r ut? But it's me f'r a flyin' machine next time Oi'm imbibin' th' intoxicatin' delights av a gold-rush."

When the horses had drunk their fill and were digging their teeth into the good grass, McGlusky thawed a bit.

"We've no' done sae bad, buckies; tha' first spell were easy, twa hours ta fresh up th' horses, an' we'll gang on again; we'll ha'e some real hard goin' then, an' it will be worse ter-morrow."

Ginger, who was biting bread and bacon, nearly choked himself.

"Och, sorr, Oi'm thinkin' we'll knock th' horses up if we ride 'em any more ter-night."

"Y're richt, laddie, an' we will no' ride, we'll lead 'em."

A smothered laugh broke from the Sergeant.

"It's yerself wouldn't be laughin' this minute, Sergeant dear, if y'r saddle had rubbed two patches av skin as big as a dinner-plate off th' part yez sit on."

"More wounds for you to brag about, my lad," came the cheering response. Then in a whisper intended for the Irish lad's ear only, the Englishman said: "We're from the old country, my boy, we must not grouse in front of these Australians and Yanks. Keep your end up."

"Faith, Oi'll kape *that* end up, Sergeant dear, an' so would yerself if yez had lost two patches av skin as big as a boot heel."

When the little party had eaten, the leader said—

"Noo snatch a wink o' sleep, A'll wake ye in time ta march."

They needed no second bidding, nor any rocking either. The veteran took a last look at the horses, then stretching himself on the rocky hillside, he listened for a while to the tinkle of the horse bells; now and again a swift jangle of bells made him swear crisply.

"It's th' midges bitin' the horses' eyelids and nostrils that make them shake their heads an' clash the bells, Mac."

"A ken it, Snowey, an' A'm feared th' dom midges will mak' th' beasties restless, an' they may wander."

"Too leg-weary for that, Old Sport."

"Air ye no' sleepin', Snowey?"

"Me? No."

"Midges worryin' ye, buckie?"

"Not me, Mac; my hide's too hard-baked f'r a midge ter work on, it's th' gold-bug bitin', Mac."

"Oh aye, A ken aboot tha' same bug; it's been gnawin' at ma vitals these three days past; every time A close ma eyes A see a pile o' yellow nuggets."

"Same here. I'll buy a cattle station if I strike it rich, partner."

"If A strike it lucky, ma son, A'll send Ginger ta college f'r twa years. A'm theenkin' gin he has an education he'll mak' a regenerator o' his kind; th' buckie's born ta greatness, Snowey, he's a wunderfu' whelp in his way."

"He *is*," agreed the ex-Anzac rifleman; "he'll shore make his mark—if some one don't kill him out here."

McGlusky turned on his shoulder with a disgusted grunt and went to sleep, for he had the faculty of going to sleep or keeping awake at will, a priceless gift in a leader of men. He could also wake at any given moment. Ginger used to say—

"Him? He don't want any one to wake him, he winds himself up like a blinkin' alarm clock before he goes to his blankets."

In a couple of hours he sat up, glanced at the stars, and then: "Turn oot." His voice broke in upon his comrade's dreams. He was on his feet the next moment, ready for work, for, as Butterfly phrased it, he only had to run his fingers through his whiskers and his toilet was complete, for he slept in his boots in times of emergency. His comrades caught the spirit of their leader and moved with a snap that spoke volumes for their training.

Ginger made some passing reference to the cuticle he had lost through saddle-rubbing.

"Dinna fash, ma mannie, A'll cure ye once an' f'r a' o' that complaint when we've pegged out oor claims."

"Will ye, sorr? How?"

"How? Why, A'll mak' a pickle o' brine, an' ye'll sit in it."

"Will Oi, sorr?" Ginger edged round on the other side of the horse he was leading. "Be me sinful soul, Oi will not—you an' y'r blinkin' pickle."

"It's a gran' recipe, it will mak' y'r hide like a saddle-flap."

The others chuckled at Ginger's answer, which was

not complimentary to McGlusky's experiments, and then all talk was cut out, for a big barren hill loomed in front of them, the sides so steep and smooth they had literally to pull their horses up it by the bridles, and knees were grazed and tempers frayed, and the sweat ran off men and animals like rain before they reached the top of that granite hill, which was almost a mountain.

No one worked better than Ginger whilst the pinch was on; in fact, more than once he was most helpful to his comrades, for he had the natural activity of a cat. He glowed all over when Snowey, who was panting from his exertions, in spite of his whipcord-like frame, remarked—

"You're a good bit of stuff in time o' trouble, kid."

Instead of replying to his comrade's praise, the Irish imp whispered—

"Do yez think th' Auld Timer'll stop now, if I throw a fit? I've got one handy."

"Stop—nothin', he'll carry you or strap you into the saddle."

If the climb up that pile of granite was bad, it was worse going down the other side; even the hounds slipped on the glass-like surface, which had been polished by wind and sun and rain. Half-way down one of the pack-horses broke a leg. McGlusky tore off the pack and threw it on one side.

"We'll leave that ta rot here," said he. Then: "Sergeant, put a bullet inta th' head o' th' puir beastie; it's th' kindest we can dae."

Coming to some good grass, the leader halted for a bit.

"Ye rest f'r a wee while, A'll clam'er up yon hill an' spy oot th' lay o' th' lan'."

The Sergeant took a step in the leader's direction, but Snowey's iron grip fastened on the Englishman's wrist and forced him back, whilst McGlusky went on.

"What did you stop me for?" demanded the Britisher hotly. "I'm younger than he is, I wanted to save him that climb."

"He's as touchy as hell to-night, Sergeant, he'd go off quicker 'n blasting-powder. I know him better than you do, an', son, don't you worry about savin' him any; we'll be all in an' washed out before he turns a hair; too old at fifty is a thunderin' lie in th' bush."

Whilst McGlusky was away, a change came over the weather: a rough wind had sprung out of nowhere, the sky became overcast with scudding clouds, big raindrops fell, and the night changed from stifling heat to raw cold. Snowey had been swift to notice the change; he took command in the pioneer's absence, by virtue of his knowledge of the ways of the bush.

"Get y'r coats an' warm things out o' th' packs, an' be smart about it, we're in f'r a change, and a chill now may mean pneumonia or bush fever an' dysentery—shake a leg." This done, he ordered the saddles and packs to be dragged up the side of the hill. "When rain comes like this," he explained, "it's apt to come down in bucketsful at a time, an' this gulley will have a young torrent in it; get th' horses over on this side, they'll make uphill as th' flood-water comes, bush-bred horses savee trouble when they see it comin'." They all worked with a will, though they were dead weary. "Scramble round an' pull up dead bushes, an' let's

have a fire, it will warm us and guide th' Old Timer."

"Gee, but the night has turned as black as perjury," exclaimed Butterfly, "an' it's blowin' a blizzard."

"Och, thin, everything's mixed wid mercy," growled Ginger. "We can't go further this blessed night; it's me f'r a siesta."

He hunched his back against a boulder that acted as a wind-break, and pulling his coat around his ears, sought slumber.

McGlusky came trailing down the gully, the raging wind and rain driving in his face and almost sweeping him away. As soon as he had got his breath by the camp fire, he said—

"A kenned weel ye'd order th' camp a'richt, Snowey; ye know th' way o' it." He peered at the lowering sky. "A theenk maist o' th' rain wull blow ower soon, an' th' moon will gie us a bit licht then."

"Thinkin' o' goin' on?" queried Butterfly.

"Wha' else wad A be theenkin' o'? Dinna ask ma sic daft questions. We've saved many a waesome mile by comin' th' way we ha' come, an' we've got far ahead o' that gang we saw on th' track. A'm hopin' we'll get ta a spot A ken aboot in time ta head off th' real prospectors, or join up wi' 'em, an' if we dae that, then, buckies, we maun tak' a pull at oor belts an' mak' a race o' it, an' maybe we'll mak' oor fortunes—th' chance is weel worth th' wee bit trouble we've taken."

"What sort of a strike is it, partner—reefing claims, or alluvial?"

"Snowey, it's alluvial, an' th' ground nae mair than fifteen feet from top to bedrock, an' ten men who found

it, an' reported it at th' Warden's Coort, took oot ower a thousan' ounces o' gold each in a fortnight."

"Sounds pretty good to me," murmured the Sergeant. "Alluvial gold's worth three pounds seventeen an ounce, ain't it?"

"It was afore the war, it'll be worth mair now, ma son, an' y're entitled to peg oot feefty feet square o' that ground, gin ye git there before it's all pegged."

"I'll get there in time, or—or bust."

"Ye'll no' bust, Sergeant, an' eef ye dae, ye share an' share alike wi' th' rest o' oor party—ye've played th' man."

At Verdun a general had complimented the Sergeant for work well done in the field, but he had not felt his pulse quicken as it did when the old iron pioneer's words fell on his ears; the Britisher knew he had been measured by a man and not found wanting.

The rain blew over for a while, and the moon peeped fitfully between the scudding clouds. The leader rose and stretched his cramped limbs.

"Get ready, buckies."

They rose, wet to the skin and chilled to the bone. The big man put a caressing hand on the Irish youth's shoulder.

"Buck up, ma mannie, a wee walk f'r a few hours will warm ye."

"Och, ye needn't worry over me, sorr, yez promised me a good time in Australia; Oi'm enjoyin' it fine."

"A thocht maybe ye'd be feelin' th' wet after th' heat."

"Me? Wet, sorr? Oi'm as dhry as a bone—inside."

Then began a battle that only men who had wrestled

with hardships could have fought. The wind, which had gathered force in the interval, smote them and almost carried them away; now and again squalls of rain caught them as in a deluge; horses jibbed and had to be dragged along by main force; falls were frequent in the treacherous light, but ever McGlusky's indomitable will prevailed, and his cry "Stick it, buckies, stick it," kept their hearts up, and at last they looked down upon a plain dotted with camp fires.

"Yon's th' men we had tae catch up wi'; to-morrow we've got tae beat 'em; we've no' done bad—f'r a start."

"Did you hear that, Ginger? We've not done bad f'r a start," chortled Butterfly, whose good humour a landslip could not have broken.

"Did Oi hear ut—oh, thank y'r mother f'r th' goat, ye ondacent son av Columbus. Oi've heard all I want ter hear f'r wan night, unless ut's some one saying buttered toast f'r breakfast, an' then Oi'd say ut's a lie."

CHAPTER IV

MAIDA'S WILD ENDEAVOUR

The camp on which McGlusky's party had looked down from the rocky heights of the Barren Hills was composed of men who had early got the news of the gold-strike, and had pushed on. They were possibly as hard-bitten a crowd as one could hope to find in one bunch anywhere on the planet; all were roughly garbed, most were as rough as their clothes; some were decent fellows; many were good or bad according to their circumstances—this latter kind would go straight enough in an easy, indifferent kind of way, as long as they were not hard up, but if pinched by poverty, few of them would stick at anything. They were representatives of nearly all countries, adventurers who had drifted out to Australia after the World War, mingled with sons of the soil, and there were few lambs amongst these latter fellows. The keynote of the camp was quiet recklessness. There was very little swagger or noise, for real recklessness is seldom ostentatious; now and again some foul-mouthed, noisy brute advertised his presence, but such pariahs were usually followed by glances of contempt: they doubtless considered they were creating a sensation—a mistake that sort of beast is apt to make at all times, but it would have been a boot, not a gun, that would have been used on one of that sort, had trouble arisen.

At one of the fires four men sat playing dice for fairly heavy stakes. They had spread a piece of waterproof sheeting on the ground, where the firelight fell full upon it, and on this they cast the dice. The man who held the box was an ordinary-looking individual, who might have passed muster as a master mechanic, or something of that kind, but the men he was dicing with knew him for the most expert professional gambler south of the line. He shook the box slowly, and apparently without method.

"Make your bets," he challenged, "I've got fourteen to beat."

The bets were made and the gamester threw.

"Seventeen," was all he said as he raked in the money.

"How many dice have you got up your sleeve, Madox?" sneered a black-bearded man on the left-hand side.

"Forgot to count 'em, Trench. Would you like to look up my sleeve and see?"

The man called Trench did not display any undue eagerness to accept the invitation; possibly he fancied there might have been other things besides dice up that same sleeve, he had heard of such phenomena in regard to the gambler's clothing.

"Pass the box, I'll try my luck with it for a change," he said, and Madox tossed box and dice across to him.

Then the gamester spoke.

"Say, Trench, you can step back out of the firelight and fill your sleeve with loaded dice if you like; I shan't object if the others don't. You're too blinkin' slow and

clumsy to get 'em down so as to deceive a bread-and-butter kid."

The others laughed and Trench swore vividly. Then he replied with dignity—

"I don't put loaded dice in my sleeve, sir."

"No, not as a rule," said Madox, yawning behind one of his clumsy-looking hands with its thick, stubby fingers. "As a rule, Trench, you slip 'em between your belt an' your breeches. I've got tired of watching you do it, so I thought I'd tell you. I hate things when they grow monotonous."

"Is that why you hate honest work, Madox?"

"That's it exactly; if work wasn't monotonous I'd have been honest enough, and if I have to gamble with you, Trench, I'll chuck the game and take to work—you're so easy."

"Easy, am I? We'll see; you don't know everything, Madox."

"Lord no, but——"

"Can I sit in?"

The request came from a man who had come quietly out of the night.

"Yes, the more the merrier," called the gambler cheerily.

Several other men, drawn by the sound of voices, came up, and soon quite a little crowd stood or knelt around the camp fire.

"My name's Madox — perhaps you've heard of me?"

This was said to the person who had asked to join the game.

"Madox the gambler, eh?"

"The same, sir."

"Well, I've heard you're crooked."

"Nothing straight under the sun," was the smiling retort. Madox always smiled, when he did not laugh outright.

"That's your philosophy, eh, my friend?"

"It is, stranger, and I'll wager the edge and middle of my soul you are no better. You've made marks in life with a crooked stick."

"You're a charming person, Mr. Madox."

"Yes, I live by my charm of manner. Now you"—with a swift glance at the newcomer's face—"you could go a long way on your beauty."

Every one present glanced in the new arrival's direction, and they saw a face of remarkable handsomeness. "Too damn good-lookin' f'r a man," as Bandy Hopkins expressed it, and the face was backed by a figure so tall and strong and supple-looking that it caused others besides Hopkins to lower their voices when passing a verdict unfavourable to the masculinity of the stranger's looks. He was an individual quite at home in surroundings where crude passions might be apt to burst loose; his cool effrontery and utter *nonchalance* proved it, just as surely as his voice declared him to be a man of education and travel.

"Suppose we cut out the personal remarks, Mr. Madox, and rattle the box, though I might remark before we commence that I share your philosophy learned by the lamp of experience; I do not think there is a straight man between hell and Afghanistan."

"Includin' Australia, Mister?" drawled a voice.

"Oh dear no; I'm sure from what I've seen of

Australians they are all pure and undefiled and as innocent as doves."

The bitterness that crept into the voice as the stranger uttered this taunt, and the sneer that curled his lip, were well worthy of the words. Madox picked up the box and let three dice rattle into it.

"We play all in, eh, stranger?"

"Rooney is my name—now."

"Fits you like a man's pants fits a kid's doll," grinned Madox, "but Rooney it is, if you say so."

"It's as good as another, Mr. Madox, and, yes, we play 'all in,' which is, I take it, Colonial phrasing for 'all we know.'"

For half an hour they gambled, and the stakes kept on increasing; that both were "sharping," each knew, yet so quick were they that neither caught the other in the act. The excitement of the watchers was so intense that they did not hear a horse approaching, until a voice said—

"Can any one tell me where Bill Edmonds is camped?"

Then all eyes turned, for the voice was the voice of a woman.

Maida Lamarde was looking down upon them from the back of her thoroughbred mare.

An elderly grizzled man stepped out of the ring of people.

"I'm right here, Miss Maida." He stood by the girl's mare and spoke in a low tone. "What brings you here, my girl? This is no place for you, or the like o' you."

"I'm going to the rush, Mr. Edmonds."

"What for?"

"I've taken out a 'miner's right,' and I'm going to peg out a claim and work it too, if I'm lucky enough to stake out a piece of land worth working."

"You'll never get there in time, my girl, and you've no business to try."

"What's to stop me? My mare can outpace and outstay anything in these parts; as for right to try, I've as good a right as any one else."

"You're a girl, that's why, Miss Maida, and this is no place for a decent girl." He looked round him and spoke again: "These men are not the men who have known you all your life, they didn't know your father. Come to my camp an' stay the night, and in the morning, you face home again."

"I'll stay to-night, and thanks, but I go on with the rush."

"You shan't."

"I shall."

"Your dad was a pal o' mine; I'll do by his daughter as I know he'd have done by mine."

"You're wasting your breath, Mr. Edmonds."

The girl sat in her saddle as all Colonial girls sit who are riders of the bush—easily, gracefully, as much at home as if she had been in a rocking-chair. Her good looks were plainly revealed by the light of the moon. Her mare looked a bit leg weary, but there was no sign of tiredness about the rider.

"Damn nice-looking lass that—who is she?"

It was the stranger who had given his name as Rooney who spoke, and his voice reached the ears of the girl in the saddle, as possibly the speaker had

intended it should. She turned her eyes in his direction, and looked down into his handsome face. He, half sitting, half sprawling by the fire, with the dice-box in one hand, looked up at her, and both gazed long and steadily.

With a muttered oath old Bill Edmonds took hold of the mare's bridle rein, and swung the animal round, saying gruffly: "My camp's close handy."

"Pretty cool piece of calico, whoever she is."

Again it was the voice of Rooney, and this time he addressed Madox in direct fashion. The gamester leant forward and replied—

"Yes, she's cool enough, cooler than you would be, stranger, if her father, old Joe Lamarde, happened to be in this crowd, and heard you speak of Miss Maida like that."

"Joe Lamarde's daughter——"

As he uttered the words, Rooney let the dice-box fall from his hand. As he reached to pick it up, he lifted his handsome head and gazed after the girl's retreating form, and at the same moment Maida, as if drawn by the magnetism of his regard, turned in her saddle, and gazed hard at the man.

Madox broke the spell.

"Did you know old Joe Lamarde, stranger?"

"Me? No, never met him, but I heard about his death—murdered, wasn't he?"

"That's about it. He would have spoilt your beauty, Mr.—Rooney, if he had heard you speak of his daughter as you did."

"I'm afraid of no man in these parts, Madox."

"Well, you don't look the sort that suffers from

cold feet, but let me tell you, you won't find many in these parts that are afraid of you either."

"Oh, shucks, who cares one way or the other? Madox, I never make trouble, but if it comes my way, I keep my end up."

"Shall we rattle the box? I'm too restless to sleep, an' I guess there will be a grand stampede as soon as darkness goes."

Restlessness seemed to be the major note in the camp; all there knew what a grim struggle lay in front of them, but the bite of the gold-bug drove away all desire to sleep.

"Seems to be gettin' a thunderin' good downpour o' rain in th' Barren Hills yonder," remarked a man who had been peering into the night.

"Yes," said Madox, "I noticed it an hour ago; wonder if it will spread to these plains."

"Dunno; you never can tell where rain will spread to at this time o' the year, but I'm blinkin' glad I'm not tryin' ter cross th' Barrens in a storm."

"Me too," interpolated a long, lanky individual, who had "Australian cattle-man" written unmistakably all over him. "I did it once, though," he drawled; "there wasn't a drop o' moisture or a breath of air on the other side o' the Barrens when I entered th' ranges, an' there wasn't much on these plains when I got through, but all the same I got water an' wind enough amongst them blinkin' hills ter last me a lifetime that night. Before the rain came, the wind blew th' gravel in my face, an' it cut an' marked me as if I'd had smallpox, an' what skin th' gravel left, th' hail cut away when it came—yes I'm glad it ain't me in th' Barrens ter-night, mates."

"Must ha' had pressin' business ter take you through on a night like that, Ike," drawled a voice from the circle.

Ike grinned.

"I shore had—mighty pressin' business too—know Trooper Jim?"

"Yes."

"Well, he was doin' th' pressin'."

"What was it that time, Ike?" cooed Madox.

"Well, my cock-bird, a bunch o' old Grantham's steers kept follerin' me, and follerin' me, away near Minteroo station. I'm mighty nervous o' wild steers."

Ike stopped to bite off a corner of his tobacco plug, and the crowd laughed, for in all the back country there was no man who could handle bush-bred cattle like this long, lantern-jawed, skin-and-bone individual, who was prattling of his fear of horned beasts.

"Tell us about it, Ike."

"Nuthin' ter tell: that bunch o' steers just wouldn't leave me, they was shore the most inquisitive lot o' horns an' hoofs that ever run wild; they seemed ter think I was somethin' they had known once, an'—an' mislaid; they got on my nerves at last."

"Rushed you, eh, Ike."

"They did," said Ike sadly, "an' they followed me right bang to the rail-head an'—an' th' blame fool things got theirselves sold somehow, an' went away by train an' Trooper Jim came monkeyin' round lookin' f'r me—an' that's how I came ter cross th' Barrens in just sich a night as they're havin' in th' Barrens now. Gee, listen ter th' wind! If any prospector's in them hills, he's gettin' merry hell."

"He won't make it, whoever he is; only a gent who had pressin' business like Ike's would make it. I know th' Barrens: I've had some."

The man who voiced this opinion did not look like a person who could be easily daunted, yet he spoke with conviction.

"I wouldn't wager no one would make it, even to-night," ventured Madox. "We've some tough propositions in th' way of prospectors foolin' round these parts, an' they'll take some stoppin' when th' gold-bug's bitin'."

"Lord help 'em if th' wind means business when they're crossin' Mount Lonely," murmured Ike; and McGlusky would have endorsed that view had he been present, for it was on the slippery granite slope of Mount Lonely that the best of his pack-horses had been blown off its feet to its death.

"Glad I ain't got no pressin' business near that howlin' wilderness," ejaculated a youth who looked like a boundary rider down on his luck.

"You *will* have, son, you shore will, unless you learn ter fake brands better'n you did the last lot I saw you convertin' ter socialistic purposes. You may thank your lucky stars Trooper Jim didn't drop his opaque vision on them same brands before th' cattle was hustled away from th' rail-head. If you can't improve on *that*, you go ter th' city an' hustle up a job ter distribute tracts in th' Chinese quarter—that's a job you might hold down f'r a season." And at that sally every one laughed except the boundary rider.

Whilst the men in the open were gaming and talking round the various camp fires, Maida Lamarde was com-

fortably installed in old Bill Edmonds's tent. This teamster was a speculator in his way; he carted goods from rail-heads to mining camps much as Joe Lamarde had done, and in addition he ran a kind of general store when things warranted it. He had no settled place for his store, but pitched a big tent at any convenient spot, which he stocked with every imaginable thing that prospectors might be supposed to require. This store he left in charge of his wife, a very capable woman of the pioneer type, who in addition to her other cares, had to look after their only child, a boy of about fourteen, who, through a sunstroke in infancy, was what the diggers termed a "natural." This boy was a walking epitome of Scripture texts, which he was in the habit of dropping into the midst of any and every conversation in which he took part. He had acquired this habit through his mother's teaching, Mrs. Edmonds having determined to offset his mental deficiency by a most pious training.

The good woman fully endorsed her husband's view of the situation when the teamster brought Maida to the store.

"By the land," she exclaimed when she saw the girl, "I wonder your poor father didn't turn in his grave when you started! And what was your mother about to let you come on this madcap errand, Maidee?"

"She couldn't stop me," was the cool answer.

"Couldn't stop you, indeed! By the land, I'd have stopped you pretty sharp if you'd been my lass, I would that, if I'd had to spank the nonsense out of you. I don't know what girls are a-comin' to these days, by th' land, I don't."

"Did your mother spank you when you ran away from home to get married? You know you were two years younger than I am now when you did it, Mrs. Edmonds."

The good woman gasped, and the teamster chuckled, but the "natural" remarked in his preternaturally solemn voice—

"Judge not, lest ye be judged."

"That boy talks like a deacon, Susannah," remarked Edmonds.

"He don't," snapped his spouse, "he talks like a parrot."

"Gets right on to the spot most times, though; sometimes I fancy he knows more'n we think he does."

They gave Maida a good supper and her mare a feed of corn, and advised her to go to bed.

"Couldn't sleep a wink if I did. I'll just sit up an' watch." After a while she spoke to her host: "Mr. Edmonds, who was that man by the fire gambling with Madox?"

"There were a good many gamblin', Maidee."

"You know the man I mean—the one who spoke, the good-looking one."

"The fellow who had the cheek to talk about your good looks, lass?"

"Yes."

Promptly the "natural" came on the scene again with a quotation: "All men are liars," he said, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"This one wasn't, not that time anyway, sonnikin," grumbled the teamster, "but he was too fresh by a

mile. Don't know his name, Maidee, but he calls himself Rooney."

"You don't think that is his name?"

"No, I don't; he invented it on the spot, but I don't care what his name is, I don't like him—he's a shade too rapid for my money."

"The race is not always to the swift," murmured the "natural."

"If you open your head again for an hour, I'll—I'll gag you," grumbled the teamster.

The "natural" looked solemnly at the clock, and for an hour no more quotations bubbled out of him.

The teamster busied himself making up accounts; his wife sewed a patch into a pair of the "natural's" pants, and Maida Lamarde sat with her elbow on the table, and her strong chin resting in her palm, her eyes looking either into the past or the future—she saw nothing of the present. The "natural" watched the clock.

Suddenly the flap of the store tent was jerked aside and a big, rough-looking man stood in the aperture. His clothing was torn and wet and fouled with mud, his face was bleeding from many small wounds.

"Ma name's McGlusky."

"By th' land, an' ye look it!" exclaimed the dame, dropping her work and rising quickly.

The teamster-storekeeper pushed away his papers, and rose almost as soon as his wife. Maida never shifted her position. The "natural" allowed his solemn gaze to shift slowly from the clock until his eyes fell upon the face at the tent entrance.

"Jimmy McGlusky, where in the name of little fishes

have you sprung from? Man, I thought you'd been killed in the war."

"Na, na, Bill, A'm no' dead yet. A've just crossed th' Barrens yonner, where th' winds air a wee bittie blustersome, an' th' gravel's flyin'. A'm scratchit a trifle, that's a'."

"Scratched a trifle!" growled the teamster; "why, old mate, your face looks as if it had just passed through a winnowing machine."

"By the land, it does, Mr. McGlusky, an' your hands are all torn and bleedin'."

"Dinna ca' ma 'Mister' McGlusky, unless ye've got anything against me, dame; A dandled ye on ma knee when ye were a wean. A'm as A were before th' war, just plain Jamie, though in Italy where me an' ma mates were fechtin' at th' end o' th' great campaign, they did ma th' honour to brand ma Chevalier Jamie de McGlusky. Noo let ma introduce ma mates."

The rest of the party had crowded in behind the leader, and a badly battered lot they looked, for the storm in the Barrens had spared none of them. Dame Edmonds, full of commiseration, began at once to attend to them, for she was all woman, from her head to her heels. The "natural" simply stared at the newcomers. Maida gave no sign, she did not even shift her pose, and they glanced at her awkwardly. The Sergeant was the first to break the spell: he advanced with hand outstretched. She rose, and their hands met.

"How on earth did you get here, Miss Maida?"

"By an easier route than you did, judging by the look of you, Sergeant. But," she added, "I expect I

had a good long start of you; I got the news early, and I know this country inside out: I've spent a lot of my life here."

McGlusky broke in gruffly—

"Good f'r ye ye didn't come through yon hills th' nicht, th' flyin' shingle wad ha' spoilt y'r beauty, A'm theenkin'."

"My beauty, as you call it, is my own, sir."

The big man looked distinctly uncomfortable under the girl's steady gaze and formal manner. Snowey also appeared ill at ease. Butterfly Brown was, or appeared to be, indifferent, but Ginger, usually such a woman-over, was unquestionably hostile. The girl looked him over in a way which Butterfly at a later date described "as if she was sizin' up somethin' f'r sale, an' didn't think it worth th' price."

When McGlusky learned that Maida was intent on joining the rush at dawn for the purpose of pegging out a claim, he voiced his opinion—

"It's no' a job f'r a wumman, an' na company f'r a lass—leastways no lass wi' a character ta lose."

"I'm not asking for advice, sir, nor assistance either."

McGlusky swore softly amongst his whiskers.

"Och, let ut alone, sorr, that wan can take care av herself."

The girl turned her eyes on Ginger, and a flicker of a smile played about her mouth.

"Quite nicely, sir, thank you."

Her words, though crisp, were charged with mockery.

"Oi'm spakin' me mind."

"Such a large mind, and so full of experience in the ways of the bush, sir."

The mockery that had been around the girl's mouth had crept into her eyes also, and Ginger, usually so ready with a retort, drew back abashed; he felt that the bush-girl was laughing at him, and he did not like it. He and Snowey and Butterfly Brown went out to feed the horses, for the teamster sold oats as well as human food. During the operation Ginger remarked—

"Do yez know who that girl reminds me av?"

"Ought ter remind you of a bull-ant, the way she stung you, son," chuckled Butterfly.

"I'll swear she don't remind you of any one who was in love with you, kid," drawled Snowey, "if she does, you shore like your love done up in funny packets."

"You remember Lucrezia Corbellia, th' flower-seller av th' Rialto Bridge?"

"Not likely ter forgit that human posy, son, she was a peach ter look at, but she didn't leave a nice taste in th' mouth," was Butterfly's answer.

"You haven't forgot her ayther, have ye, Snowey?"

"I'm a bad forgitter, kid, I can hear her now, jibin' at Signor McGlusky, as she called th' Old Timer. But she wasn't all bad, she had her good points."

"She had that, Snowey, she made th' loveliest corpse Oi ever saw after th' firin' party had done wid her, she looked like a drame—when she was dead."

"What put th' Italian signorita into what does duty f'r y'r brain, Ginger?"

"This girl Maida Lamarde," growled the Irish imp; "she's another that looks like something good f'r breakfast, an' tastes like treachery—ter me."

"Is that because she admired th' size o' y'r colossal

mind, son, an'—an' didn't hide her admiration from th' rest of us?"

Ginger made a vicious dab at Snowey's impassive face, but only succeeded in punching the stable lantern which the Sharpshooter adroitly put in the way of the outflung fist. The red-headed youth was about to renew the assault, but Snowey remarked—

"Be careful, son, this stable's only built of boughs, an' boughs burn easy."

The quick burst of temper died out of Ginger.

"All right," he grumbled, "but you watch out, an' don't let th' girl in th' store set you afire. Oi wudden't ate meat off th' same plate wid *her*, if she finds th' best claim on th' new rush."

"Why?"

"Because she shambled her own father, an' if she didn't, wan av her lovers did, an' she was in ut, that's why."

Maida Lamarde, standing just outside the bough stable, heard that awful accusation, clenched her hands by her sides for a passing moment, then her strange smile played around her lips.

"Forewarned is forearmed, Ginger," she murmured, and flitted back to the store.

It still wanted some little time ere the dawn came, and whilst the men ate a hearty supper provided by the dame, the teamster questioned them concerning the doings of the Australians and New Zealand troops in the various theatres of the World War. Maida asked no questions; the "natural" sat with his queer, clouded eyes fixed on vacancy. Suddenly the teamster asked—

"Do you recollect Sam Brophy's three boys?"

"A mind them weel, though they were only laddies when A left. Anything amiss wi' them?"

"All killed in the East, McGlusky."

"They were no' at Gallipoli?"

"No; they went out after that, when you were in France."

"We've made history, but th' young Anzac nations ha' paid a waefu' price f'r it; we ha' gie'd oor best ta th' guns."

"Was it worth it—oh, was it worth it?"

The cry came from the dame's lips.

"Am no' knowin', dame. If it was f'r th' real freedom o' th' world—yes; if not—no. A felt sure aboot it once, A'm no' so sure since A've come home ta ma ain. Oor wummin dinna greet ower their losses, they bleed inside, an' tears o' blood are waesome."

The Sergeant, who had fought much in the Old East, told of that end of the campaign. He was a splendid *raconteur*, when he cared to talk, and he made the scenes live before their eyes, until they could feel the hot sands of the desert shifting under horses' feet, and the dreary, God-forsaken valley of the Jordan lay in all its desolation before their mental vision. He did not forget his English and Scottish or Irish comrades; he laid many a laurel on their absent brows, though he never spoke of his own deeds, nor was he stinting in his praise of Anzac valour, patience and endurance, and his hearers warmed to the English soldier who knew how to hold the balance level. He was telling them how the Anzacs were the first to enter the ancient city of Jerusalem, and how the veiled women looked at them in wonder. The name of Jerusalem seemed to

wake Biblical memories in the clouded brain of the "natural."

"Yes," continued the English soldier, "honour where honour is due—the Anzacs were the first to enter Jerusalem, and——"

The "natural" finished the sentence for him, drawling his words gravely.

"Yes; an' the shepherds watched their flocks *that* night."

A broad grin illumined Ginger's face.

"Bedad, sorr, if he's a 'natural,' he's got a grand grip av campaignin'; Oi'm thinkin' more'n th' flocks had ter be watched."

Then, leaning back in his seat, he lifted up his matchless voice and sang *The Holy City* until even the "natural's" eyes grew dim. The others took up the chorus, McGlusky's deep voice adding its thunders to the harmony.

Madox the gamester paused with the dice-box in his hand, poised to throw, and listened with the throng around his camp fire.

"I've heard some funny things on a new rush, Rooney, but that trumps the trick."

And Rooney, looking up, said: "Yes; and here's the dawn coming, and that will trump all."

A lot of other people beside Rooney were watching for that first faint flutter of pale light in the east, and the camp broke up as if by magic. Horses, camels and mules were saddled or hitched up, and before the dawn had fairly arrived, the gold-hunters were stealing away, for Mike Jackson, one of the lucky finders of the new ground, had mounted on a stump, and in a few

terse sentences had given the exact location to th crowd. He was the man who had been into the main Warden's camp and reported the find, and secured for himself and mates a "reward" claim apiece, which meant that each of the original finders was entitled to one hundred feet of ground, instead of fifty feet, the space allotted to all others. Mike and his mates had pegged out their ground before he went in to announce the find, and their ground would be inviolate, no matter how great the crowd might be, for no digger will ever try to jump a reward claim, for by such means are new discoveries made known, and the whole community would rise like one man to protect the "reward" party.

McGlusky and his little crowd were amongst the first on the move; their horses had received a bad gruelling in the hills, but to compensate for this, they had fed well on oats, whilst nearly all the other horses had been compelled to wander all night seeking for the scanty grass.

Possibly the very first person to get away in the saddle was Maida Lamarde, and her light weight and the quality and condition of her mare and her knowledge of the country gave her a chance which more than one seasoned prospector envied her. Her pack-mule was not the equal of her mare, but she had not overloaded it, and the big black mule could travel fairly fast, and could outstay any horse on a badly watered and sparsely grassed stretch of country; it was for these latter qualities she had chosen the brute, and because her father had valued it highly, and he had been a judge.

"Better keep close to us, if you mean to go, Miss Maida," the good-natured Sergeant had said at the last moment.

"It's kind of you," the girl had answered brightly, "but I'll take my own line, and beat you to it. Besides, your friend Ginger would think I'd crossed his luck."

"Ginger's a white man all through, Miss, but he is a bit cranky when he gets a kink on any subject."

"He's welcome to his kinks. Just tell him from me that bough sheds have ears—sometimes."

She cantered away, her big black mule on a leading rein plugging along beside her, and the Sergeant watched her go.

"That girl will take some beating to-day, and as long as the race lasts," he said.

"She will, if she gets fair play, but there are some around here who will stick at little if they see a chance to get that mare and mule. But I guess she's wise to that," commented Snowey.

"They'll need to ride hard to catch her, an' if they do it's a pumpkin pie to a potato they'll wish they'd mislaid her," was Butterfly's contribution to the conversation. Then, as if seeking information: "I wonder where she'll find a safe camp to-night?"

Promptly a solemn voice at his elbow answered—

"The birds of the air have nests."

"Come out of it, quick," gasped Butterfly. "This 'natural' has shore got me hoodooed, he's th' voice of a lost intellect cryin' in th' wilderness."

"It's me own opinion," confided Ginger, as the party cantered behind McGlusky, "that 'natural' ain't as

short av views on life as he seems on th' surface av him. Oi have a hunch he does it ter dodge workin' f'r th' auld man; ut's not idiocy, ut's jaynius undeveloped. He'll go through life wid that cloudy look in his big eyes, an' he'll see everything barrin' hard work, an' if he does see that, he'll dodge it."

"Jealous, eh, kid?" chuckled Snowey. "They say two of a kind never agree."

Every one giggled, except McGlusky; if he heard, he did not heed. He had picked some point on the far-away horizon, and for that he steered as a bird flies; he never glanced to right or left.

The horses' hoofs and legs swished through the low bushes that dotted the plain, each bush separated from its neighbour by a few inches. Far as the eye could reach in front of them the salt-bush plain spread out like a grey-green sea; not a ripple of wind disturbed it near or far, no sign of animal life was observable, not even a lizard or a snake showed between the salt-bush.

"It's as level as a billiard table," cried Butterfly. "It beats th' sage-bush plains o' my country ter blazes."

"Glad you like it, partner," responded Snowey; "you're going to get your share of it; it's hot now, early as it is, what it will be like by mid-day will take some guessin'."

Butterfly loosed himself in the saddle; he had the cowboy seat—and made himself comfortable.

"Didn't say I liked it, pard; you ain't got to like things when the old boss leads, you've only got to do 'em, an' if he ain't got his fightin' boots on ter-day, I never saw 'em."

They rode hard and silently for a good while, taking their cue to slack up or push on from the silent man in front. Ginger cracked the silence; he had been unusually quiet—for him.

"Och, Snowey——"

"Bite it off, kid; whatever it is!"

"Where's all them kangaroos an' emus we used ter see on th' other side av th' ranges? Why ain't there any here?"

"Got too much sense, son."

"Bedad, thin, they're th' only natives av y'r auld country Oi've seen afflicted wid that complaint—y're not sufferin' from it yerself."

An amused flicker twitched the Sharpshooter's harsh lips.

"Spake, f'r th' love av Mary, an' don't be bustin' yerself inside wid ondacent silence."

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything," snapped the Irish lad.

"Then consult a doctor," came the exasperating reply, as Snowey started to fill his pipe.

"Ochone, that's what Oi ought ter have done before Oi started out wid yerself."

"Can I help you, Ginger?"

"You can't, Sergeant; ye don't know any more than meself."

Snowey gave the impetuous youth a glance, and the kindliness in his eyes encouraged Ginger to try again.

"Snowey, when th' terbacca's civilised ye enough ter be dacent, will ye tell a pilgrim *why* there are no wild animals beside yerself on this big plain?"

"No water, son."

"No—water—an' th' roof av hivin like blue steel, blisterin' y'r eyes ter luk at ut? No water?"

"That's about it."

Ginger looked from the face of one comrade to the other, and noted the steady sternness of all; then he growled out an oath.

"Ye've been tratin' me like a kid; ye've known this all along."

"Knew it would dawn on you sooner or later, son; no use to add to your troubles, an'—well, you know now."

Ginger rode on in savage silence for a mile or two, for he hated what he termed his comrades' attempts to "dry nurse" him, though no one knew better than he that they did the things he objected to in order to save him from worrying.

"Say, Snowey——"

"Well, kid?"

"Did that girl Maida Lamarde know this big plain was waterless?"

"Guess she did; she knows all about this part of the world."

"Did you blighters think Oi'd funk anything that a girl cud face?"

"Talkin' like a fool now, chum, we know you'd funk nothin'."

"Do we reach water ter-night?"

"We may or may not—it's all a gamble, Ginger."

"An' if we don't?"

"We go on till we do."

"Be square wid me, Snowey; if we go on till th' horses are bate, an' still find no water—what then?"

"Shoot th' horses, an' go on on foot."

"Keep goin' till we drop or—or find that blinkin' gold-gulley, eh, matey?"

"Struck it, kid."

A new expression had dawned on the freckled face ot the Irish youth, a new light had come into his eyes; in some strange way the reckless, careless boy had become a man for the time being. So had it always been with him, when he accompanied McGlusky on his great adventure, to Gallipoli, and in the stern days in France and Italy.

"Bedad, Snowey, ut's—ut's a fight."

When he settled back in his saddle, even McGlusky's cast-iron visage was not more expressive of determination than Ginger's, though the lad could not for the life of him keep from his features the jaunty recklessness that was natural to him in times of stress or danger.

The day wore on, and the heat became terrific. McGlusky halted his band, and spelled the horses, and the animals being bush bred, ate the sparse dry grass, though how they got it down their parched throats was a mystery. The men each took a sip from the canvas water-bags on their saddles, and ate bully-beef and biscuits.

A few prospectors mounted mostly on camels passed them as they rested. One, a dark handsome fellow on an Indian camel, pulled up and asked—

"Have you fellows seen anything of a girl, riding a mare that shows a lot of breeding? She was leading a pack-mule."

"Did she have a useful-looking staghound with her?" queried Snowey.

"Yes."

"Cousin o' mine," lied Snowey easily. "What are you so anxious about her for, Mister?"

The reply seemed to stagger the stranger.

"Oh—er—didn't know she had any relations in this rush."

"Well, she has."

Snowey's words were simple, but there was a wealth of menace in his tones. The Sergeant had been examining the handsome face of the man on the camel, and he followed Snowey's lead.

"Yes," he said, "that girl has relations in this rush, and friends also: I'm one, and," indicating McGlusky, "he's another."

"A'd no' like ta seem inqueesitive, stranger, but wha' ma' y'r name be? Ma niece didna tell ma she expectit ta be followed by any yin."

Ginger gasped as he heard the old pioneer adopt Maida Lamarde in this off-hand manner, and he was far from pleased.

"My name"—a half-smile played round the mouth of the camel-man, "My name is—Rooney."

"Weel, Mister Rooney, dinna fash aboot th' lass, we can tak' a' th' care tha's required o' her."

Mr. Rooney gazed down from his seat on the camel, and took stock of the group. Then he remarked—

"Of course I may be mistaken, but I think you are as much related to Miss Lamarde as I am."

McGlusky sauntered close to the camel, and said very softly—

"Meanin' what, Mister?"

"Meaning you're a liar."

"Man," purred Mac, "eef ye'll coom doon frae y'r perch f'r a wee while, may th' crows gie ma burial eef A dinna pull y'r nose till ye can buckle it ta y'r belt."

"No time to waste at present," smiled Mr. Rooney, "but if we meet on the gold-rush, you shall do that to me—if you can."

"Weel, weel, business afore pleasure—A'm no blamin' ye, man; gang after y'r gold-claim, but gin A hear ye ever gie oor lassie an unclean look frae those black-guard eyes ye ha' in y'r head, A'll put saddle an' bridle on ye an' ride ye wi' spurs."

"Thanks," said Mr. Rooney, and his white teeth showed in a vicious smile. "Perhaps I'll be wearing the spurs when the riding takes place."

"Och, *you*," sneered Ginger, "he'll spoil y'r beauty when he meets yez."

"Possibly he may, my young friend," laughed Rooney. Then, with a comprehensive glance over Ginger's none too handsome features, he said in a nicely modulated voice: "In the meantime, young man, if he can do anything to improve your looks, he will be doing a public service; please don't let my camel see you, the poor beast doesn't deserve *that*.".

Ginger choked, but Snowey, lounging lazily in Rooney's direction, said in the drawl that with him always heralded danger—

"Sittin' well up on a camel talkin' big is one thing, stranger, gettin' down an' makin' good is another. What do you say to samplin' th' salt-bush with me? You'll have the best of the weights by two stone."

Rooney had an insolent retort upon his lips, when his eyes met the Sharpshooter's. Something in the

unmoved steadfastness of the young fellow's regard made Rooney pause. Then—

"I don't know that I've any trouble with you," he said.

"Och, ye big baste, an' ut's a good judge av a man y're provin' yerself now," jeered Ginger. "Me mate 'ud give yez two stone, an' th' father av a batin'."

"Perhaps—but this old world is full of surprises, Beauty."

"Tha' will dae. Gang y'r ways, an' gang noo, or A'll gie ye a hoist off y'r camel an' squeeze y'r eyebrows inta y'r ears."

There was such a snarl in McGlusky's voice as he threw out this threat, that Rooney realised he had pushed tempers to the limit of endurance, yet he displayed no fear. He just swung his camel round, and as he started he said—

"Well, I don't suppose you can help your manners, it's the way you're bred, but if I'm needing hands on my claim when you get to the new rush, look me up, and I'll see what I can do for you."

"Thank ye, sir," answered McGlusky with quiet dignity, "Ma' A ask th' name o' y'r claim?"

"Haven't pegged it yet, but I shall—I always get what I want."

"Bedad, thin, ut's here, waitin' f'r ye, Mister." As he spoke, Ginger held out a piece of rope. "Oi'm sorry," he jibed, "Oi can't provide th' gallows too, but th' government will do that f'r yez—in toime."

"A pretty wit, a very delicate and dainty wit," sneered Rooney, but they all noticed that his handsome face had paled beneath its tan.

"You touched a button you couldn't see that time, kid," murmured Butterfly admiringly, "an' I'll bet a barge full o' bananas to a baseball your gallows remark woke a sleepin' dog in that chap's mind; he won't want no souvenirs to keep y'r memory green. How you manage ter locate mysteries beats me."

"Fade away wid y'r flatthery, Yank, ut's no credit to me, ut's what th' Auld Timer calls spontaneous combustion av th' mind, ut's—ut's a gift."

CHAPTER V

THE FINDING OF THE GOLD-CLAIM

"SADDLE up!"

There was no mistaking the rasp in McGlusky's voice. Rapidly the thirsty horses were put in their gear, and the party pushed forward. The weather had been bad before the halt, now it was heart-breaking: a hot wind, such as dwellers in temperate climes cannot even dream about, had sprung up, it met them in the face, blistering hot, as if it had come straight down the belly of some mammoth furnace; the horses hung their heads and plodded on; the men all pulled their soft-brimmed hats well down over their eyes, all except McGlusky: he sat bolt upright in his saddle, his hat square on his head, a picture of indomitable manhood, defying the elements. Once Ginger, whose spirits always rose in the teeth of a tight corner, tried a little raillery—

"Foine auld country this av yours, Snowey. Oi don't wonder yez all love ut; Oi'm beginnin' ter understand th' conjanial nature av th' Anzacs now Oi've sampled th' scenery."

"You will in less than an hour."

"Will Oi—why?"

Snowey pointed to a number of little spirals of dust the wind was lifting.

Ginger grinned.

"What are they, matey? Are thim spinnin' jiggers th' ghosts av y'r people who have died out here, through—through over-atin' an' drinkin', an' gineral riotous livin' in this land av milk an' honey?"

The glance the sharpshooter turned on his pal was compressed affection symbolised.

"Don't jaw, son; keep all th' moisture in your mouth f'r breathin' purposes, you're goin' ter need it. Them spirals of dust are th' advance guards of a big dust-storm, an' we'll be lucky if we get th' horses through."

Ginger looked hard into the speaker's face.

"Is ut as bad as that, matey?" Snowey nodded. "Ye're wastin' no moisture on words, chum." Then he glanced at McGlusky, and for once his soul peeped through his eyes. "Bedad, matey, ut will crack him across th' middle ter be bate."

"Does he look like being beat?"

"Him? He looks as if he was ridin' to a weddin' wid three bridesmaids fightin' ter be Mrs. McGlusky. Th' divil couldn't bate him, an'—an' this auld dust-storm shan't."

"Not if you can help it, you game little——"

Snowey finished with an expletive that when uttered in a tone of endearment is seldom resented by bushmen, but if said with a snarl is a deadly insult.

"Cut out th' moisture; who's wastin' words now?" jeered Ginger, though he thrilled all over to the praise of this man who praised so few.

The dust-storm came down towards them, a great reddish-yellow wall of fine sand and clay mixed.

"Och, ut's a thousand fate high," gasped Ginger, as he watched the dread phenomenon of the unbroken plains.

"Reach up to th' sky before it gets to us, kid."

McGlusky swung his horse round and faced his men.

"Yonner comes th' storm; ride as close as ye can, an' keep th' pack-beasties in th' middle—A'm goin' ta try a venture—we'll ride through it if we can, if we canna we'll halt an' chance oor luck. Grip y'r bridles, buckies, an' dinna let y'r horses turn tail ta th' dust till A tell ye. Eef ye canna face it, or y'r beastie falls, throw yersel's face doon on th' ground, an' "—he tossed one big hand towards the skies—"th' old grey gods o' oor forbears be wi' us."

They rode on.

"Prayin', Butterfly?"

It was the irrepressible voice of Ginger.

"Yep—prayin' f'r rain, son."

The next instant the dense reddish mass was on them, over them, all round them, and in that moment Snowey stretched out a lean sinewy hand and grasped Ginger's bridle rein, and drew the Irish lad's horse close to his own. For one brief second the comrades of so many fights and stern hardships were naked soul to soul, for Ginger stooping forward clasped his hand on that other that clung to his bridle rein, and man spoke to man along the channels of the spirit.

The dust became so thick as they rode into it, and as the wind from behind pressed it on to them, that soon they could only dimly make out the forms of each other and the horses. McGlusky had bidden them bind their handkerchiefs over nostrils and mouths, and it

was well for those who were new to such storms that they had a veteran to advise them. As it was, they were soon fighting for their lives, with eyes full of scorching grit and lungs well-nigh choked; with the heat that had become devilish grilling them, their brains began to reel, and only the knowledge that McGlusky was leading them kept them steady; instinct and long knowledge of their leader told them that their only chance lay in following him, no matter where or how he led. Ginger at another period tried to explain how he felt in that hour, but all he could say was—

"By Mary, it was beyant all describin'! We rode in th' middle av a red an' yaller nightmare, wid our horses walkin' slower an' slower at every step, as th' dust grew denser; thin Butterfly's horse was clane bate, an' fell wid him, an' him under, an' th' Sergeant, who was near him, clambered out av his saddle an' somehow, only Mary knows how, pulled Butterfly from under an' turned th' Yank face down on th' ground an' lay down beside him, an' th' Sergeant's horse turned tail to th' storm an' wandered down th' wind, poor baste, an' we never saw it alive again, an' my horse was bate too, an' tried to turn, an' would ha' turned too, for me head was bustin', an' Oi cud only cling to th' saddle, but Snowey stuck ter me bridle rein, an' kept me horse movin'. Thin Snowey's horse giv out, and dropped to uts knees, an' me chum, me pal, he just got to his feet an' grabbed my rein, an' be gosh, ye can belave me or ye can give me the lie, but Snowey dragged that horse o' mine on, dragged ut through that blinkin' sea o' dust till we hit th'

sweet air beyant, an' when Oi saw him drag th' handkerchief from his face, th' blood was drippin' out av Snowey's ears an' from his nostrils, an' mixin' wid th dust on his face, like rain mixes mud near a brick-field. It's a blinkin' hard country in thim parts, but it made men like Snowey an' th' Auld Timer. Oi washed me mouth from water in me bag: Oi'd ha' gulped th' lot, but Snowey snatched it. Then McGlusky came, an' all he said was: 'Butterfly—th' Sergeant?' an' Snowey nodded back th' way we'd come, an'—an' th' auld sportsman, he slipped from his saddle, an' took his water-bag an' he plunged back into that red an' yaller hell! all he said was: 'Son, ye look after ma wee laddie,' and away he went, till he looked like a ghost in th' damned dust, and then he disappeared entirely, an' Snowey sat dabbin' me lips wid a wet corner av his handkerchief an' throttlin' me when Oi tried to fight him f'r th' water-bag, for Oi went loco about that time, an' Oi disremember if Snowey found time to take a drink f'r himself."

It was the Sharpshooter who told how later on McGlusky and the lion-hearted Sergeant came staggering through the dense-coloured clouds, bearing the unconscious body of Butterfly Brown between them. He told also in his quaint way how the English soldier reeled and would have fallen after the Yankee had been placed on the ground.

"It shore was good to see the Old Timer then," said Snowey. "Our English pal was all in; he must have had enough o' that cussed storm-dust inside him to make a good-sized garden-plot, an' his lips was all swelled an' cracked an' bloody from th' alkali in th'

dust, an' his eyes just like two balls of blood, but game—not a streak of yellow in him from armpit to armpit, an' no strength left in him: he'd given his last ounce to save his pal, an' he shore began to crumple up like a wet towel when you try to stand it on end after a bath, there wasn't enough vital spark left in him just then ter make a taper ter see ter kiss a cuddlesome wench by, an' yet he tried ter laugh—funniest kind o' a bubblin' sound that laugh made ever I heard, it was like somethin' bein' poured back in a bottle. Old Mac just wrapped his arms around the Englishman like a mother welcomin' home a kid that's been ter sea an' reported lost in a storm. He carried th' Sergeant an' laid him beside Ginger an' fed him drop by drop with water from his bag whilst I dragged Butterfly Brown back from the pearly gates o' th' beyond by th' same means; leastways," added Snowey, "Butterfly said when he come round that it was th' pearly gates I dragged him from, but I shore wouldn't have thought so myself, judgin' by his language, which was frequent an' full o' variegated spots o' colour like prize blooms in a flower show. Butterfly didn't used ter cuss what you might call extravagant on general principles, but after that day you only had to remark 'dust-storm,' to hear him develop profane vocabulary that would make Sam Johnson an' old man Webster an' all th' Nuttall family despair of ever makin' a new dictionary to fit. Some o' them pictorial sentences o' that Yank would shore make a football bounce if it was spiked to a board an' filled with jokes as old an' as heavy as you buy in London *Punch* f'r sixpence."

After the desperate hazard of the alkali dust-storm,

McGlusky overhauled his losses. The horses Butterfly and Snowey had ridden were dead; the Sergeant's animal was found so far spent that a kindly shot ended its troubles, and most of the others, except McGlusky's own animal, were badly knocked up.

As night came on, a heavy dew fell, and the animals licked the moisture from the bushes greedily, and ate of the slightly damped grass.

"We've fared badly, Snowey, but ithers will fare as bad, an' some worse. A'm theenkin' there will be men as weel as beasties lyin' in th' track of th' storm th' morn's morn; we've much ta be thankfu' for, me luck were always fair ta' middlin' in th' bush."

"Hope that girl was not in th' track of this storm, Old Sportsman."

"Eff she were, son, we can look f'r th' justice o' th' old grey gods."

"Mac——"

"Weel?"

"Do you think she knew who did her father in?"

"Eff A find her body on th' plain A'll tell ye after Ave seen her face. A'm reservin' judgment till then."

"Mac, if she knows, she's shieldin' th' man, an' if she's doin' that, she's a——"

A heavy hand fell on the Sharpshooter's shoulder.

"Laddie, dinna judge till ye're sure; hell's a hospital for unjust judgments."

"All right, leave it to your old grey gods, Mac. You're back to paganism since you came home to th' bush."

"Elemental theengs brings us to elemental thochts, buckie, an' yon storm were elemental enough to wake

that ancestor in ma blood who used to crack clams for his breakfast with a stone hammer."

"If it wasn't," drawled Snowey, "your ancient ancestor ought never ter have had any other diet but clams."

"Let's gie a keek at th' present, an' dom th' past, me mannie."

"What's y'r programme?"

"What dae ye theenk yersel'?"

"Me, Mae? Well, I shore think I've got a leader who's able ter do all th' thinkin' f'r th' outfit. You drop your orders, an' I'll do my baby best ter see they're carried out. You saved all our lives to-day, an' most o' th' outfit; that alkali storm rattled me some when it was caressin' us, but you—say, Old Sportsman, is there anything outside a divoree court could rattle you, eh?"

"Dinna speak wi' leevity o' sic awesome things as divoree courts, buckie, ye gie ma th' ereeps. Noo, eef A'm ta dae th' leadin' an theenkin' f'r th' outfit, there's only one plan ter ma mind."

"Let's have it."

"You an' me will saddle th' beasties an' we'll strap those three weans on an' let 'em sleep, an' we'll lead th' outfit forrard in th' hope o' comin' to a ereek."

"Yes."

Snowey was smiling at the description of the brawny Butterfly and the stalwart Sergeant as "weans."

"Twa hours' sleep will dae f'r you an' me, we're bred ter th' bush."

"Good enough. You give th' word Mae, an' count me in."

"A'm no' given ter praisin', Snowey, ye ken that, but y're a mate worth havin', ye never let a man doon."

As it happened, there was no need to strap any of the others on their animals, though they were badly done up. Ginger clambered into his saddle, and passed a few remarks, and promptly went to sleep. Butterfly and the Sergeant were mounted on pack-horses. McGlusky led his own hack.

"Here, I say, what are you two footing it for while we ride?" cried the Sergeant, as he saw the veteran and Snowey striding in front of the outfit.

"You sit there an' sleep, it's my turn to march; I'll shore claim a horse when I'm leg weary; we'll ride turn an' turn about, mate," was Snowey's cheerful answer, and with that the Englishman and the Yankee had to be content.

The movement of the walking horses and the terrible experience they had passed through soon brought the cobwebs to the riders' eyes.

"I'm a whale f'r sleep when I get a chance at it, pardner."

This came from Butterfly in drowsy tones, and the English Sergeant answered—

"I'll be shot if I can keep my eyes open."

"Shut 'em then, an' y'r mouth too," came gruffly from the old pioneer. "Y're off duty th' noo."

The Sergeant heaved a sigh of content, and his head fell forward.

Snowey fell back and looked at the three swaying figures, and then he slipped the reins over each horse's head and knotted the three bridles together, to keep

the animals in line. Having done this, he rejoined the veteran.

"They're all snorin' th' cradle song; you get ahead, I'll walk behind th' horses and keep 'em up to their work, Old Sport."

"Verra good; A'll swing a leg, A've marked a course by yon star."

"Why don't you ride, Mac?"

"A'm savin' ma beastie. A've a plan, Snowey."

"Knew you'd think of something: your old noddle wasn't made ter grow grass on."

So McGlusky strode ahead and steered a course by the stars, and Snowey marched behind and drove the horses on hour after hour.

Once the Sergeant woke with a start and sat upright with a jerk.

"Time to relieve guard, eh?" he asked.

"Time be damned; you've got the jumps, Sergeant; you've only been asleep ten minutes. I'll call you when I want you."

The Sharpshooter told the lie with such swift readiness that it did its work, and the Englishman with a grunt of relief dropped into sleep again.

Once the horses, worn as they were, shied at a dead camel that lay on the plain. McGlusky examined it.

"Choked wi' th' dust that nearly did us in, son; there air mair o' them somewhere on th' plain, A'm theenkin'."

"Guess y're right, Mac. Camels will often flop right down in th' thick of a dust-storm, if a hot wind's blowin'—rather have a good horse any old time myself."

"Aye, mannie, an' when once they flop down old Blastie himsel' canna git 'em up again. A horse is a horse a' th' time; a camel's a camel when it wants ta be, an' a damn conundrum when it don't."

The coming of daylight found them on the edge of a dry creek where one solitary gum-tree upreared itself.

"Halt—an' wake the laddies."

Before the words were well out of his mouth, the leader was clambering to the bottom of the creek.

"Any signs?"

No one listening to the Sharpshooter's voice as he put his question would have surmised that success or failure, probably life itself, hung on the answer. McGlusky was on his knees clawing out dry sand and gravel.

"Dry as last year's wool on a wire fence, buckie, but yon tree wad no' be here an' livin' if there was no watter. Pitch ma a shovel, an' mak' camp."

Snowey tossed down two shovels from one of the packs.

"See to camp, Sergeant."

That was all he said, and a moment later he was working on a hole of his own in the bed of the creek a dozen yards below the veteran. Ginger soon followed, and the Yankee and the Englishman looked after camp. Stripping the horses, they let them nibble the grass, which was scarce enough to make a mouthful a rarity. Soon the horses gave up seeking it; they stood with drooping heads and bloodshot eyes, the very picture of misery.

The Sergeant noticed that his mate moved as if in pain.

"Anything wrong, chum?"

"Well," murmured Butterfly, "when that horse fell in the dust-storm, an' rolled on me, he may have meant well, but he didn't key me up like a show pianner."

"Feelin' bad, eh?"

"Feelin' like a kid caught in a neighbour's melon-patch."

"You lie down, chum, and I'll rig up a sun shelter, I can do it with a couple of blankets."

"Well, if I'm to be the prize babe in this show, I might as well take all the honours, Sergeant."

He slid down amid the salt-bush as he spoke, and fainted dead away.

The Englishman wasted no time in calling for help; he just poured a little of their precious water between the American's lips, pushed an old coat under his head for a pillow, and then rigged a sunshade over him; then he looked down into the rugged face that had grown so ghastly all at once, and said—

"Busted, an' nearly settled, an' never whimpered once."

He ran a hand that was strangely gentle over the sick man's forehead, and rising, went to the edge of the creek, and looking down saw the three inseparables at work. Each had a hole going; McGlusky and Snowey were shovelling steadily, but Ginger was toiling like a thing possessed. The sweat ran out of his red hair and down his freckled face; he was naked to the waist, and beads of sweat formed on his lean body and ran in

trickles to his belt. Suddenly he stooped, grabbed a handful of sand and gravel from the bottom of the hole looked at it, and yelled—

"Th' luck av' th' Oirish—sorr, Oi've struck ut."

One glance McGlusky gave at the handful of moist gravel, then his stern old face beamed.

"Wee mannie, ye've struck watter a'right, y're no alway sic a fule as ye look."

"Cut out th' compliments, sorr, an' let me get on wid me diggin'," grinned the Irish youth.

They all set to work with renewed vigour, and soon the others got into moist gravel, but there was no rush of the precious fluid; drop by drop it sweated its way through the sides of the holes excavated, for it was only rainwater that had sunk in the bed of the creek beyond the reach of the sun's rays, all that had lain near the surface had evaporated in the summer heat. As soon as a wee drop accumulated in the bottom of a hole it was scooped up in a pannikin and placed in a bucket and the half-maddened horses scenting this, made frantic efforts to get to it, and that kept the Sergeant busy. It took them hours to collect a couple of bucketsful, and then McGlusky unfolded the plan he had hatched during the night march.

"We came nigh bein' beaten, buckies," he remarked, "and most o' those who started f'r th' new rush wi' us air in as bad case, an' no doot some are worse off. Gie th' watter ye've collectit ta my horse, an' fill my water-bag, an' A'll ride on alone, an' peg oot one claim—good or bad we'll share it between us. A'll gie Snowey th' bearin's o' th' new ground, an' he's a bushman, he'll lead ye ta me when ye've collected watter enough

ta put life into y'r beasties." He paused, then: "Wha dae ye theenk o' ma plan?"

"No one's goin' ter do any thinkin' about it," snapped Snowey, "you're our leader, give your orders."

"That's the way to talk, Snowey," cried the Sergeant.

"Well," jeered Ginger, "Oi ain't raisin' a revolution, an' Butterfly, he's non-com-pos-mend-us, or near it."

"Where did you get your Latin, kid?" chuckled Snowey.

"Me? Oi found ut on a medicine bottle in France. What's wrong wid ut, eh?"

They gave all their store of water to the veteran's horse, and filled his canvas bag from what they had left in their own bags, and he rode away.

"Och, we'll have one claim between us, anyway," chuckled Ginger.

"Sure thing," agreed the Sharpshooter, "or there'll be daisies growin' on some one's grave in that direction after th' next rain."

"Oi hope he don't meet Mister Rooney till Oi get there," sighed Ginger. "Oi want ter see what Rooney looks like before he's buried."

"Perhaps Rooney won't fight," suggested the Sergeant.

"Bedad if he don't there'll be an illigant fut race. An' a fut race wid th' Auld Timer in it, an' him hungry f'r a scrap, will be worth watchin'; he can run like a cock emu, auld as he is. There's interesting times ahead f'r Mr. Rooney."

"That chap will throw a gun if he's cornered, law or no law," ventured the Englishman.

"So will I," murmured Snowey. "You see it's different since the war; we never touched 'guns' in the old days, leastways, not often, but the gun habit has got hold of about three hundred thousand chaps who have had four years of war, so if Mr. Rooney fondles a shootin'-iron, as he did all the time he was cheekin' us from his camel, he's not goin' ter get no start on me—he's bad."

"Oi think he's a four flusher."

"Wrong, kid, he's a killer: I read it in his eyes durin' our parley, he was itchin' ter kill then, but he reckoned the odds was too big."

The Sergeant nodded his acquiescence, then remarked: "Think he's Australian, Snowey, eh?"

"Dunno; he's bad to th' bone, wherever he comes from. He's an educated scalliwag: when a bad dog comes from a good kennel, it's mostly all bad."

"How did he come by th' name av Rooney? He's not Irish."

"Shore I dunno, Ginger, unless he found it where you found your Latin. Names are easily found an' easily mislaid in the bush."

Suddenly Ginger straightened his slim figure, and the look his comrades knew when all the wild devil in him was roused came into his face.

"By Mary, if that scut throws a gun on me Auld Timer—an' gets him, Oi'll drain th' life out av him drip by drip till he prays f'r any kind av an endin', th' jackal—th' blinkin', blisterin' jackal!"

Snowey made no answer to this fierce outburst, but the keen-eyed Sergeant saw an expression dawn on the usually immobile face of the Sharpshooter which made

him thank his Creator that Snowey of the old Anzacs was his good friend instead of an enemy, for used as he was to war and all the latent ferocity that war breeds, never had he seen such unrelenting menace on a human face ; and warm as his own heart was towards McGlusky, he could not help wondering what latent quality the rough old borderer possessed to breed such worship. Often he had heard it said of the three comrades: " If you cut the finger of one, the other two bleed," and he knew now that the saying was true.

The old pioneer rode upon his quest, not hurriedly as a novice might have done, but steadily with a kind of relentless calmness characteristic of his nature. The horse he rode he had selected with the greatest care on one of the breeding stations.

" A'm no' wantin' a racehorse," he had said to the man in charge, " an' A'm no seekin' something ta ride in a circus where looks count. A want something no' too old an' no' too young, something wi' a drop o' good blood in it, a real horse tha' can gallop a bit, jump a bit, an' ' stay ' till fish grow feathers."

They had shown him many, and he had passed all by until he saw a well-sinker handling his own private hack, and he had bought it, paying a price for it that made his comrades stare, and he paid it without haggling, simply remarking—

" A ken weel when A've found a bargain."

The well-sinker had pouched the money, remarking : " Well, mate, I don't know, an' I don't care what your game is, but if you ever feel like tryin' your hand bush-ranging, you've got the horse for the job."

When he had ridden a few miles, the old bushman

dismounted, loosed his girths and throwing the bridle over his arm, walked off at a pace that simply devoured distance, and when he felt his powers begin to flag he cinched up his girths and swinging to saddle, rode on. The line he had taken was practically straight through the salt-bush plain spread round him like a waveless sea. Most men would have zigzagged in their course, but he had the instinct of a homing bird, seeming to have the power to make a mental line and follow it, a gift all Australian blacks have, but very few white men. He did not give a thought to the camp he had left, for he knew Snowey, and was aware that his lieutenant would see the outfit through any trouble that might arise, and there was plenty in store for the outfit.

After McGlusky had departed the men collected the water pannikin by pannikin, and as soon as enough for a drink was stored, one of the horses had it, but it was dreadfully slow and trying work, but patience and perseverance is the law of the bush, and at last the animals had had sufficient drink to enable them to feed.

"Glory be!" growled Ginger as the last beast was forced away from the creek on to the plain, "ut's meself knows th' value av water now."

"Come an' feed, son, then we'll start collecting f'r th' next drink; we'll have to keep at it pretty near all th' time, then perhaps we'll be able ter start on th' Old Sportsman's trail to-morrow morning."

"Och, you'll have ter have some sleep, Snowey; me an' th' Sergeant have detailed ourselves f'r this job."

"Can do with a wink or two, that's a fact, son."

"Oi'm not bustin' wid wakefulness meself, pal, but you've done more than y'r share, an' a wire fence is th' only thing Oi know that can do widout sleep."

They found Butterfly much better after his good long rest.

"I shore feel as mean as the man that tried to feed his hogs on Gospel tracts left by th' missionary," was the Yankee's greeting.

"Why, chum?" smiled the Sergeant.

"Lyin' here on a bed o' roses while you chaps have been workin'."

"Och, don't you place none av thim same roses on my grave, Yank, if Oi go after me harp an' crown through overwork."

Ginger's cheerful grin illuminated his remarks.

"Don't you worry about us overworkin', mate," supplemented Snowey, "we've only been lyin' down by three holes watchin' the water pour in like a—a cataract."

"No immediate danger of a flood, I hope, Snowey?"

"Divil a danger, Butterfly," giggled Ginger, "th' water came tearin' an' poundin' into thim holes at the rate av wan precious drop a minute—when th' flood was at its worst; it didn't bust me arithmetic ter count th' drops as they fell."

The Sergeant made Snowey stretch himself out on a blanket and vowed faithfully to wake him up in an hour. Then he and Ginger went to work again at the water-holes.

"Ye said ye'd wake him in an hour," chuckled Ginger, when the fourth bucket was full.

"Yes, but I didn't say what hour, lad."

"Good f'r yez, Sergeant, y're comin' on in y'r diplomacy."

How long the two friendly conspirators would have let the Sharpshooter sleep is beyond guessing. The awakening came with the arrival of a party of belated prospectors with famished horses.

Snowey leapt off his blanket, and buckled on his guns, as he ran to the water-holes. Ginger and the Sergeant were standing protectingly over the buckets they had filled, angry men and famished, crazy horses all round them. As Snowey arrived, a man snarled—

"Damn you, you shan't hog all that water, we'll have some of it."

The Sergeant snapped out an oath. "Not on your life; we dug it and drained it."

With a quick, cool movement Snowey was inside the angry circle, and alongside his comrades.

"What's th' trouble, boys?"

"A peck an' a half, an' some over f'r bakin'," snarled Ginger.

"We want a share of this water, an' we're goin' to have it, that's the trouble," stormed a prospector.

"Quite right too, mate."

Snowey's cool reply steadied the crowd.

"Glad you've got some sense," came from the other side.

"Me?" said Snowey. "Shore I have, sense is my strong suit. What did you want to rush our camp for?"

"We want that water."

Butterfly came limping on the scene, and Snowey

noticed the Yankee had strapped on his guns. Neither Ginger nor the Sergeant were armed; their weapons were in camp. Snowey passed a gun to Ginger, and Butterfly slid one into the Englishman's hand.

"You can't scare us with gun play."

The Sharpshooter gazed at the speaker, who stood in the full glare of the moonlight.

"We ain't that kind"—Snowey's voice was low and level—"but if you rush us, we'll shoot." Hands dropped to hips all round the circle, a false move would have spelt a tragedy. "Play the game square, boys; we found this creek an' prospected it, an' found th' fluid; our horses ain't had a square drink yet; when they have, we're pushin' on, an' you can have these holes, or you can sink a few feet in th' gravel an' get water as we did: you don't get any of this."

He lifted one foot and put it on the edge of the bucket nearest him, and his mates followed his example.

"Will you sell the water?"

"No—if there's a man in your crowd who has none for his own use, let him come an' drink out o' this bucket—that is prospectin' law, but our horses before yours."

They said they all had water for their own thirst, enough at least for a few hours, all except one youth.

"I'm baked dry, my water bag sprung a leak," he explained.

"Come an' drink." Snowey's voice was harsh with the tension of the moment.

The youth knelt to drink, then he looked up into Snowey's face.

"My—horse," he gasped, "he's my blinkin' pal—

he's dead licked—let me put—my drink in my hat—an' give it to my—horse."

Perhaps it was the moonlight playing tricks with Snowey's face—perhaps, but all who looked at him then saw his face grow soft as a woman's.

"All right, bring your horse."

The youth rose and went, and in a second or two returned with what looked like a pony to Ginger, but Snowey knew the sort, half Timor pony, half thoroughbred.

"Slip her bridle."

The youth obeyed, and Snowey lifted the brimming bucket and held it to the mare's muzzle. She drank greedily, drank until the bucket was drained, and her owner turned to lead her away, but the Sergeant's strong right hand fell on his shoulder.

"Your turn now, mate—by God, you're a man."

The Englishman with kindly force bent the young bushman to his knees beside the nearest bucket, and the spent man drank so greedily that Ginger cried—

"Bedad, Snowey, if yez don't stop him, he'll—he'll bu'st his corphasargus member entoirely."

"His *what?*"

"Och, ut's Latin f'r about thirty fate av works inside him, an'—an' he'll bust th' whole outfit."

The young fellow rose, and after drawing his forearm across his mouth, laid his bronzed cheek against his mare's jowl, then he turned to the Sharpshooter, and his voice was badly broken as he tried to utter his thanks.

"My mare—my pal—I—I——"

Get out of it, or I'll pass you one."

That was what the grim fighter said, but the watchers noticed that it was he who led the little mare to a spot where the grass grew thickest.

With one accord the whole of the newly arrived gold-seekers turned to their packs, and producing shovels began to dig holes in the creek for water, and Ginger bossed the job, and gave them advice as if he had been a well-sinker all his life. At first they took him seriously and started to follow his advice, but in the end a prospector with silver streaks in his beard, said with a good-natured grin—

"Look here, copper-top, you sit on the bank and pray f'r rain, or—or sing for it, an' let us do the digging in our own way. Your ideas might be all right for enlargin' th' Panama Canal, but they're a bit too scientific f'r prospectin' purposes."

"All he knows about the game he learnt in this creek a few hours ago," chortled the Yankee.

"Och, an' ut's yerself that's a liar, Butterfly. Wasn't Oi camped by th' side av th' Sooez Canal wid th' Anzacs, an' didn't Oi learn all about ut, an' how ut was dug?"

"Who filled you ter overflowin' with that precious knowledge, son?"

"A haythin nigger that got a livin' tellin' fortunes by lukin' into a bit av crystal; he said Oi was a born engineer, an' wud live ter give orders an' have men worrukin' under me—an' that's come true, anyway, Butterfly, f'r Oi'm on th' bank an' thim blighters are diggin' holes in th' bed below. Oi belave in crystal-gazin', Oi do."

"Shore thing you do," murmured Snowey, who had

come on the scene; "you'd believe in anything that would encourage you to loaf. I've been crystal-gazin', Ginger, an' my crystal tells me it's time f'r you to round up those horses an' help ter get a move on."

The crowd parted with them good-naturedly when they made their start, and Snowey had no difficulty in steering the course the old bushman had mapped out for him, though it puzzled the others to know how he could find signs to guide him on that unbroken expanse of slate-grey bush that rose no higher than a horse's hocks, and looked as featureless as a whitewashed wall, but the bushman's instinct was strongly developed in the Sharpshooter, and things hidden from the others were plain to him.

In the meantime, McGlusky had been walking furiously and riding cannily, taking a terrific lot out of himself, but sparing his horse as much as possible. A dreamer and a visionary he might be by the camp fire, but on a quest like this he was the man of action personified, with every faculty concentrated on the job in hand. He talked to his horse as if it were a human being, and if the animal did not understand the words, the sound of the master's voice cheered the brave brute, and acted better than whip or spur, for between some horses and some men exists the magic of affinity, though often the horse is the nobler brute. Once after a stiff burst McGlusky ran his hand along the sweating neck of his equine comrade, and said—

"Y're a gran' pal; ye dinna ken why A'm takin' it oot o' ye like this, but if ye win it means oats an' hay f'r ye, an' maybe a gran' grass meadow ter kick y'r heels in a' y'r days. A'll share fair wi' ye, f'r ye air a

gran' beastie, an' that's mair than A cud say f'r many a man A've trekked wi' wi'oot strainin' th' back button off th' breeks o' truth."

Once when the light was very bad, the horse trod on the thin crust of earth under which a wombat had burrowed. McGlusky was cantering along at the time, and being weary with his hard work, he was sitting loosely in the saddle, his reins slack, his pipe in full blast, his eyes fixed on a guiding star. The horse's hoof crashed through the thin crust, the leg sank to the knee, and the brute turned a somersault, landing the big man on his head a yard or two in advance. For a second or two he lay stunned, a grotesque figure amid the bushes, then he rose and shook himself like a Newfoundland dog emerging from the water.

"A'm no' hurtit, thank th' old grey gods, leastways A canna hear any broken bones rattle; it wad ha' been waesome eef A'd had ta carry on wi' a broken leg, A'd no' ha' been able ta dae justice ta ma mates, an'—they trustit ma. Jamie de McGlusky, ye've no' leeved up ta y'r new nobeelity, y're no' fit ta be a Chevalier o' Eetaly."

He went to the frightened horse and gentled it, and it was characteristic of him that he did not lay the blame of the bad blunder on the horse as so many men would have done, but shouldered the responsibility with stubborn justice.

"It were ma ain fault; dinna sweat an' tremble; A'm no' sic' a pariah as ta jerk y'r mouth or dig a spur in y'r flanks. A should ha' kep' a tight han' on ma reins an' yin eye on ma star an' yin on th' plain, an' A've got off wi' naething worse than a broken pipe-

stem an' a loomp on ma crown as big as a bun. Weel, weel, wha' A've lost in th' pipe-stem, A've made up in th' lump unner ma hat. Steady, ma beastie, everything in life is mixed wi' marcy."

He went his way, toiling and struggling, and it was a grim, dirty figure of a man and a badly-knocked-up horse that at last reached the "gold-ground." His first care was to water his horse and hobble it out to pick its food, then he ranged his eyes over the new find.

"A've no' done sae bad. Maist o' them here afore ma are camel-men, an' no' sae many o' them. Th' place will be a human ant-hill th' morn's morn, or A'm a fule."

The new find was in a shallow valley. Possibly a score of claims had been pegged out, each man pegging his fifty feet square, with the exception of the original finders who had their reward claim. A few tents were up, and one drinking-shanty made from boughs cut from a small belt of scrub timber close by. A number of camels and a few horses were grazing not far off. In front of one tent a rough sign read "Water sold here." In front of another McGlusky read "General Store." He knew from that sign that the original finders of the ground had sold information to some big merchant, who had promptly packed out stores on fast camels lightly laden, stores that would be sold at a vast increase on their township prices.

He went to the store, bought a pick and shovel, and an axe, and made a few canny inquiries concerning the run of the gold, and was moving away when the store-keeper who had been sizing him up with shrewd eyes, said—

"Want a grubstake, mate? If you do, I'll fix you up for a third of the claim you peg."

"A'm thankin' ye, but A'm no' needin' it, A'm no' broke."

"All right, mate, no harm done, eh? Thought I'd ask: you don't look like a new chum at the game, and I like the old stock myself."

"Na harm at a', man; if A was broke A'd be glad o' a decent storekeeper's backin'. A've had it afore, an' may want it again."

"Well, good luck!"

"Th' best o' it ta yersel', storekeeper, an' say, if ma mates ca' here, an' they wull, tell them A'll fly th' Tiger flag ower ma claim so's they'll ken where ta look f'r me; ma mate's called Snowey, he'll be in charge o' ma outfit."

"Right. What's your name?"

"Jamie de McGlusky, but ye can drop th' 'de' f'r th' present, it's a wee bit handle A picked up ta ma name in Eetaly."

The storekeeper stared at the rough, uncouth, dirty figure.

"Not McGlusky of Gallipoli?"

"A were there."

"Is your mate Snowey the Anzac Sharpshooter?"

"He is, an' ma A ask eef he's owin' ye anything?" The old bushman's hand was at his money pouch as he spoke. "A ken weel," continued he, "ma mate Snowey had a run o' bad luck afore he went ta th' war, so eef it's a matter o' siller, storekeeper—hoo much?"

"Never saw him, but I'll be damned glad to do

anything for him or you either; I've read *McGlusky's Great Adventure.* Is Ginger alive?"

"He was when A left him wi' th' rest o' ma outfit, verra much alive is ma wee mannie."

The storekeeper came very close and whispered in the veteran's ear—

"I know all about you and your pals, I've read all the books written about you."

"Hae ye? Weel, if ye meet th' man who wrote 'em, you tell th' buckie A'll kick him in th' wame eef A come across him, f'r puttin' ma in a buk, th' scut."

"Look here, McGlusky, I'll tell you what I wouldn't tell my own mother."

"Eef it's anything no' decent——" began the big man.

"Shut up and listen. Don't bother to peg out in this valley; go right up to the western end, and a mile from here you'll find a little valley branching off. There's only one claim pegged there, an' I'm grub-stakin' th' pegger. You get a move on an' collar th' ground above, it's rich."

"A'll no' fergit ye if ye're telling me th' truth an' A get on ter th' metal—an', man, A'll no' fergit ye if y're lyin' an' put me on to a duffer." He put both his big hands on to the storekeeper's shoulders and peered into the man's eyes like some old watch-dog on a chain taking the measure of a stranger. "A'm th' advance guard, trustit by ma mates; eef ye've fuled ma, losh, buckie, th' day we meet ye'll wish y'r mither had never wedded, f'r, by ma old grey gods, A'll no' leave enough o' ye in one piece f'r a mosquito ta nest in an' bring up a family. A'm no' a man o' strife, ye

ken, but A've ta redeem a trust placed in ma by ma mates. Gin ye want ta withdraw wha' ye said aboot th' ground in th' little valley, dae it noo, an'—an' A'll only hit ye yince—f'r luck."

The storekeeper laughed.

"Withdraw—nothin', not a blinkin' word; we owe you chaps too much to fool your sort. Why, mate, McGlusky, Snowey an' Ginger an' all your sort made fame enough for us to keep us cool in hell."

"Weel, weel, A'm weeshin' ye a' th' comforts o' a hame when ye get there," purred McGlusky, and strode off to peg his ground, and even amongst the tough, hard-bitten prospectors whom he passed, the splendid energy and tireless might of his body and his movements were not unremarked.

The sun was setting when he turned into the small valley, and he noticed with pleasure that only one tent stood there, and one claim was pegged. Just before he reached the tent he saw a horse feeding amid the bushes. He gave the animal a casual glance at first, and then paused and looked keenly at it. Then he whistled a long, low, unmelodious note.

"Weel, A'm dommed, Jamie de McGlusky, ma' y'r next crop o' whuskers grow all on th' yeenside, which wad no' be a pleasure f'r ye or th' whuskers, eef ye've no' been beat at y'r ain game, an'—by a wumman."

He was correct in his surmise, for the horse he looked at was Maida Lamarde's, and the claim and tent in the small valley were hers. She came out of her tent at the sound of his approaching footsteps, and he noticed what he had never before seen on an Australian

girl or woman—a most useful-looking gun strapped round her waist.

When she saw who the newcomer was, her face lit up with pleasure and relief, but only for a moment did the expression last; a second afterwards it had vanished, and she appeared the same cool, self-possessed young woman he had previously known. She was the first to speak—

"You have come in good time, Mr. McGlusky."

He could not hide his chagrin.

"No' so soon, since a lass cud beat ma."

"I did not beat you, it was my mare."

"Ma ain horse were good enough f'r anything, ye need no' blame ma beastie."

"I knew the country, and I asked my mare a big question, and she answered it. I knew by the signs that a real brickfield dust-storm was coming up; there is only one direction a real brickfield can come from in these parts, and I rode right across country out of its track, and came in behind it, by passing round its edge; you would have done the same if you'd known the district."

"Ye must ha' ridden far and fast."

"I did; that was where the quality of my mare and the stamina of my pack-mule came in."

McGlusky looked round amongst the salt-bush.

"A see y'r mare, Miss Maida, but A dinna see y'r pack-mule."

"No; it was stolen at my last camp, mule and pack, all my outfit. I got the storekeeper to grubstake me on shares; he had known my parents."

"Ye dae weel to wear a gun, though A never

thocht ta see an Australian wumman wearin' one."

"Why?"

"Because men who air mean enough ta loot a wumman's pack-mule will no' hesitate ta jump her claim—if it's worth jumpin'."

"It is, but if any man sets foot inside my pegs unasked, I'll shoot." The girl spoke very quietly, but there was that in her manner which told McGlusky she would not hesitate to make her words good if occasion arose. "Are you going to peg here, or have you selected your ground?"

"A'll peg on ta y'r claim. Which end is th' best? Dae ye mind sayin'?"

"The top end." Maida intimated where she meant by a movement of her hand. "Of course," she added, "I have only surface indications to go by, but I took a dish of dirt from each corner and got the best results from the top end."

"Ye've been dry blowin', eh, Miss?"

"Yes, we'll all have to do that, there's no water to wash the dirt, the only spring near here is claimed by the man who is selling water in the main camp, he sunk a well on the spring, and charges a reasonable price for the water."

"A'm theenkin' na one will dispute his right ta it if he sells fair and does no' charge too high a price; if he does, he'll maybe strike trouble."

McGlusky had been working whilst he talked. He put in a peg close to Maida's, and dug two trenches at right angles nine inches deep, then drawing from his pocket a small revolving tape-measure such as surveyors

carry, he very carefully measured off his fifty-feet square, and put in all his pegs and dug right-angle trenches, and affixed his papers to each peg.

"There," he grunted with a sigh of relief, as he tossed down pick and shovel in the centre, "noo A've done a' tha' a man cud dae; this belongs ta me an' ma mates, an' A'd like ta see th' buckie tha' wad try ta lay han' or fut on it."

"Do you always measure your ground like that, Mr. McGlusky?"

"When A'm no' pushed f'r time, A dae, it saves trouble when skunks come round swearin' ye've mair than y'r fair share, but if it's a race between me an' some ithers, A just drive in my pegs an' settle th' measurin' later on."

"I haven't measured mine, I just 'stepped it'; you see, I hadn't a tape measure, I never thought of one."

"Better measure now; A'll hold th' tape against my pegs, an' ye run off th' distance. Ye dinna want a fuss later when th' mob comes; they'll run th' rule over y'r ground, an' if it's rich they'll make trouble if ye've an inch too much; dinna gie th' jumpers a wee bittie o' an excuse, they'll hang an action at law on a square inch o' soil, an' hang th' whole claim up an' perhaps win it."

They measured, and found Maida had a good yard too much ground, so they shifted the two outer pegs in by three feet, and the girl's ground was secure.

"Noo," remarked the old bushman, "A'll gang to yon trees wi' ma axe an' cut th' longest A can get f'r a flagstaff; A want a sign ta guide ma mates when they reach th' rush."

He was soon back with a ten-foot pole, to which he proceeded to attach his shirt by simply tying the sleeves to the pole. Having done this, he hoisted his peculiar banner in the centre of his claim.

"Yon garment is striped black an' yellow. A bought it in Padua, in Italy; when Snowey sees it he wull ken it richt enough. He called it ma tiger shirt, an' by th' thustles A planted on ma mither's grave, yon banner shall gie oor claim its name."

"What a funny name for a gold-claim, Mr. McGlusky."

"A dinna see anything funny in it ava."

Maida smiled.

"Well, the—the shirt seems a queer name to me."

"Hoots, lassie, it's th' colour an' th' markin' A'm theenkin' o', no' th' use A made o' wha' is now oor banner. Yellow an' black, th' tiger's marks. A'll call oor claim th' Tiger Claim, an' the buckie who meddles wi' it wull find it's no' sa badly christened."

"What are you going to do for a tent and blankets, sir?"

Mac pointed to the hard, brown earth. "There's ma tent an' blankets, lassie, till ma mates come."

"What are you going to do for food?"

"Ma?" There was a touch of impatience in the veteran's voice, as if he thought such questioning foolish. "A've a chunk o' cheese an' some biscuits in ma coat pockets, an' A've ma pipe—th' stem's verra short, but it wull serve; eef ye'll gie ma a sup o' watter A'll ha' a feast fit f'r a king."

Maida brought out the water and a blanket, but he refused the latter. The girl stood and watched

him eat his frugal meal, then: "Good-night," said she.

"Good-nicht, an' eef any one comes roon', just gie ma a cry, an' A'll dae ma best ta make this spot a wee bittie unpopular."

"Thanks, I will if I need you; but I've my stag-hound tied up inside my tent, and I've this." She laid a hand on the gun at her hip as she spoke.

"Ye'll dae," he answered gruffly; "ye'll mak' good."

When the girl had gone, Mac took off his boots, wrapped them in his coat for a pillow, lit his pipe, and stretched his great loose limbs at ease on the warm hard earth with a sigh of unutterable content.

"A wad no' change places wi' th' King in Buckingham Palace," he murmured. "A've all that th' heart o' a man cud crave for—a bit o' th' soil tha' bred ma ta lie on, an' forty million stars, mair or less, ta look it; ma tobacco tastes sweet in ma mouth, A've a good job weel done ahint ma, an' anither full o' expectations an' adventure afore ma. Jamie de McGlusky, th' old grey gods o' oor fathers ha' been gude ta ye in th' autumn o' y'r days; eef A cud only hear th' voice o' th' wee de'il Ginger singin' o' th' love o' wummin, which th' blastie never felt in earnest, though he's always practisin' an' makin' believe, A'd be as proud as Bill Kaiser was afore we gie'd him th' boot."

CHAPTER VI

THE TIGER GOLD-CLAIM

THE day after McGlusky pegged his claim, the storekeeper who was grubstaking Maida Lamarde came out with a supply of stores on a couple of camels. When he had given the girl her quota, he said—

"I've stuff here for sale, McGlusky, and unless your mates are packing out supplies, you'd better buy what you want now, and, what's more, you'd better let me fix up a contract with the man at the spring, so as to make sure of water; a cyclist has just come in, and he reports a young army of prospectors hurrying here."

"Tha' sounds like sense ta me; ye can unload wha' ye've got on ma claim, an' A'll pay ye."

This was soon done, and the storekeeper went off, promising to bring a tent and camp requisites as soon as possible. When he had gone, Maida asked the veteran where his horse was.

"A gie'd th' beastie as much watter as it cud drink, an' turned it out ta graze, an' A canna gang ta look f'r it—some one might try ta jump th' 'Tiger' in ma absence."

"That's not diggers' law, if you're only away from your claim for an hour or two."

"Ye ken a' aboot diggers' law, ma lass, seein' ye were raised by an old digger; but, ma wench, they'll

care de'il an' a' aboot law when th' mob arrives an' begins peggin' in earnest. Ma horse will have ta put up wi' short commons till ma mates arrive."

"I know your horse, and can pick it out of a thousand; if you care to keep an eye on my claim, I'll put the saddle on my mare and round your horse in; it can drink here with mine until the man at the well brings your water out."

"Lassie, ye've '*some*' sense. A dinna care f'r a wumman on her lonesome on a gold-rush; it dinna seem richt ta ma, but y're no' all a fule."

The girl looked at him under her bent brows for a moment, then smiled.

"I don't think paying compliments is your strong suit, is it?" she asked.

"Ma? Oh, A dinna often mak' pretty speeches like tha' one; A'm generally a wee bittie blunt an' ower plain-spoken. Eef ye care ta gang after ma horse, A'll look after y'r bit claim; it will be here when ye return. Noo A'm goin' ta begin diggin' on th' 'Tiger.'"

He lifted his pick as he spoke, but Maida Lamarde still loitered.

"Mr. McGlusky——"

"Wha's bitin' ye th' noo, lass?"

"You are."

"I didna ken it; tell ma hoo?"

"When you first met me at my mother's place, you were ready to make friends with me."

"Weel?"

"I liked you from the first, sir; you looked so—so dependable."

"Weel?"

McGlusky lifted his shaggy head as he uttered his non-committal syllable, and the strangely assorted pair gazed at each other.

"You are not friendly to me now; if I were a man you would not have me in your party."

"A wad not."

"Why?"

The girl's voice rang out in splendid challenge.

"A'm reservin' ma judgment."

"No; you have judged."

With those words Maida Lamarde turned and walked towards her horse, and McGlusky drove his pick into "The Tiger." He did not see her saddle her mare and ride away; he never glanced in her direction—he just wrought on with pick and shovel until the sweat poured off him.

"How's the luck, mate?"

McGlusky looked up at the question, and saw three men standing on his claim.

"A'm no' knowin', A've no' sampled her yet, A'm just rootin' round a bit; maybe she's good, maybe she's a duffer, A'll ken mair in a few hours."

"Just started on her, eh?"

"If ye used y'r eyes instead o' y'r mouth, ye'd see f'r yersel'."

One of the trio spoke to the man who had questioned the old bushman.

"Take your boots off, Possum, can't you see this is holy ground, and no blinkin' questions permitted?"

The fellow called "Possum" sniggered, then pointing to the "Tiger" banner, he queried—

"What's that for, mate? Are you goin' ter take in washin'? Goin' ter start a laundry, eh?"

"No," cooed McGlusky, "A hung that up there ta gie fules something ta ask questions aboot."

He went on digging.

"Who owns this claim next to you?" demanded Possum.

"Can ye no' read?"

"Yes."

"Weel, th' name's on yon peg—read it."

Possum sauntered in the direction indicated, and read the name: "Maida Lamarde, Miner's right, number 674986."

"A blinkin' woman."

This came from one of the pair on McGlusky's claim.

"It's a plant," said the third man, "this chap is holdin' up two men's ground—got a mate comin' on behind somewhere."

McGlusky toiled on.

Possum looked at the tent from the outside; he also noticed the stores and the tools, and he winked at his cronies.

"Say, old rawbones, is this claim with the family washin' flyin' over it yours?"

"This yin where A'm workin' is mine."

"Then," said Possum impressively, "this one with the tent an' tools an' tucker on it is ours; you can't work off no female digger on us, and," he added with a grin, "we'll claim all that's on it."

"Sure we do; Possum's got it right," supplemented one of the trio.

"Go and tear off that Maida Lamarde's name from them pegs, an' we'll peg the ground again," suggested the third.

The old bushman never even hinted that he heard a word; he just shovelled away at the earth. The three went towards one of Maida's pegs.

McGlusky laid down his shovel, sat down by the side of the hole he had been digging, pushed his big hands in under his coat that was lying near, and when his hands came out, each held a big ugly American revolver, known to gunmen as Colts. They may have been colts, but they seemed to have been well trained, and perfectly broken in to their work, for they went up and went off without any apparent effort on McGlusky's part, and two big slugs of lead whistled between Possum and his friends and buried themselves in the corner peg of Maida's claim. To say that Possum and his friends leapt aside and leapt asunder would not do justice to their motions; they went away from each other and from Maida's peg as if a very live wire had jerked them. When they looked round McGlusky was gazing dreamily into space, as peaceful a looking sample of humanity as ever expressed its feelings in terms of lead. Seeing that Possum and his brother jackals were wide of the peg, McGlusky very sedately drew out his wooden pipe with its inch-long stem, lit it and smoked as placidly as if his world contained no elements of trouble. Possum was the first to find his tongue.

"Here, Mister," he stormed, "what do you think you're doing, eh?"

McGlusky removed his pipe, wiped his mouth reflectively with his forearm, and then, arching his eye-

brows until he looked like the idol of innocence on a broken pedestal, he answered—

"Wha' am A daein'? Why, buckie, A'm just announcin' ma arrival on th' 'rush.' A'm advertisin' ma laundry, gie'in' th' digger buckies notice A'm takin' in washin'."

"If you point them guns at us, Mister, it's—it's attempted murder."

"Attempted? Did ye say *attempted?*"

The pioneer put such stress on the word "attempted" that Possum recoiled.

"Look here, you ancient corner-stone of a lunatic emporium, you can't bluff us; I'm going to pull up that peg."

It was the third individual who spoke, and he indicated the peg furthest away from the one in which McGlusky had planted two slugs with such consummate marksmanship. The speaker moved in the direction he had outlined.

"Dae ye mean tha' one?"

The pioneer's voice was as soft as a summer's sigh, not a trace of anger in it, but as the last words left his lips, his big guns snarled venomously, and another of Maida's pegs was pock-marked with lead in two places.

The fellow who had announced his determination to pull up that peg, jumped backwards at the first explosion, and fell on his beam ends at the second, and a laugh like a peal of bells rang out from the throat of Maida Lamarde, who had ridden up on her mare and was leading McGlusky's horse. The fellow on the ground looked round, and the pioneer said blandly—

"Git oop, buckie, an' dae it all ower again; it—it amuses th' lady."

"What's the matter?"

Maida's voice was full of sarcasm as she put the question.

"Naething—just naething," purred the big man. "A were just cleanin' ma guns, that's a'. A'm theenkin'," he added, "that maybe th' bit lead A put in y'r pegs, Miss Maida, may help ta keep them in their places, they looked a wee bit wobbly th' noo."

"I thought it was that man who looked wobbly," laughed Maida. "I never knew why they called a person who stole claims a jumper, till I saw your performance when those guns went off."

She let her voice fall like a whip-lash as she added her postscript, and even Possum looked a little meaner than usual.

"Shootin's a hangin' matter in this country."

This remark came from the fellow on the ground.

"It is." McGlusky's voice was very emphatic. "It *is*, when there's any witnesses."

As those words left the pioneer's lips, he noticed that Maida Lamarde swayed suddenly in the saddle as if she had been hit, and her hands clutched fiercely at her bridle rein. Instantly his thoughts flew away to that night when he saw her kneeling by the body of her father shot to death, and shot from behind, and his gorge rose against the girl. He uplifted himself, and the face he turned on the claim-jumpers was savage and lowering enough to have put dread into stouter hearts than rogues ever have. He spoke to them, and his voice was harsh and commanding—

"You wumman owns this claim. Get off it, an' move as if y'r innards were meant f'r a musical box, or

A'll boot ye till y'r breast-banes clip y'r beards. There's ground below her claim, an' there's ground above mine, ta be had f'r th' peggin'; eef ye want it, tak' it, but eef ye set hoof or hand on her claim or mine, A'll tak' y'r teeth oot an' sew 'em inta y'r carcases where ye'll sit on 'em. A'll see she has her richts, because she's a wumman."

Possum was the first to go, and he went on tiptoe, as if he feared he might awaken something explosive, and his mates went with him.

"A'm thankin' ye," was all the pioneer said, as he took his horse from Maida and hobbled it out near the Tiger claim.

The girl looked after him.

"I hate you." The words slipped past her lips, and then she laughed, but there was no melody in her laughter.

McGlusky returned to his work, and noticed as he dug that Possum and his friends had taken up claims a little way further up the valley.

After he had dug several shallow holes, he took his shovel and beat the earth he had thrown out until he reduced it to powder, then he filled a tin dish shaped liked a shallow wash-basin, filled it with the pounded earth, and holding the full dish high in both hands, allowed the dirt in the pan to dribble slowly over the edge into a second dish on the ground at his feet. As the beaten earth passed from the dish in the air to the dish on the ground, the wind blew a portion of the earth away in fine dust, but everything heavy like gravel, small stones, iron or gold, the wind could not deflect, and this went into the bottom dish. In his skilful

hands the process was not a long one; he was "dry-blowing," a method the resourceful Australian diggers had adopted in order to get the gold out of the clay when there was no water to be had for puddling, or, as McGlusky once phrased it, "They put the idle winds in harness an' made them do the work of watter." After he had worked off all the dirt, he examined the sediment left in the dish, and found a certain amount of gold, but nothing that even hinted at vast wealth. When he had tried out a sample from each of the holes he had sunk, he stood upright in order to give his back a rest, and then his eyes fell on his striped banner fluttering gaily in the breeze. He was disappointed with his claim prospects, and he voiced his feelings.

"A'm no' sae sure A've no' been a wee bittie premature in namin' oor claim; it micht hae been better ta ca' it 'The Shirt,' an' no' th' Tiger, for A'm dommed eef A can see any weddin' parties or cattle stations, or racehorses in it sae far."

Maida Lamarde, wearing a boy's breeks over which reposed a short skirt that just reached her knees, was working away industriously not many yards away from him, plying pick and shovel bravely. She saw by his expression that he was disappointed.

"Luck not up to sample?" she queried.

"A've had worse, an' A've had better. Hoo's your own?"

"Not bad."

She walked towards him and held out her dish in which a fine show of coarse shotty gold was discernible.

"Ye've no cause ta complain," he muttered, handing the dish back.

A yell rang out from up the valley, and looking in that direction, they saw the gentle Possum madly tossing a yellow lump in the air, and catching it dexterously.

"That man has found a nugget, and a big one, Mr. McGlusky."

"Oh, aye, he has that; weel, th' auld de'il tak's care o' his ain."

"Perhaps you'll strike it rich later on."

"Maybe A wull, maybe A won't; if A dae A'll be thankfu', if A dinna A'll no' grouse."

"You deserve a bit of luck at your time of life, sir."

McGlusky glared at the girl.

"Ma time o' life? A'll be makin' history when yon spunkless thing they ca' Possum is makin' a lunch f'r worms. Ma time o' life? Eef ye canna talk sense, get a parrit, an' unbosom yersel' ta that."

He snatched up his shovel and began to make the earth fly.

Maida returned to her toil, but many times she glanced in the pioneer's direction, and marvelled at the tireless strength of his rugged frame.

The day had well-nigh worn itself out when a long-drawn coo-ee came echoing down the little valley. McGlusky twisted his head in the direction of the sound, and saw his party, with Snowey at the head of it, riding jaded horses in a small haze of dust. Maida saw them also. McGlusky stood irresolute for just one instant, then he strode to the centre of his claim, and stood straight and tall under his queer banner.

"Och," chuckled Ginger, "th' auld [bird's pinned his shirt to his luck, and Oi'm wid him, good or bad."

Then his eyes fell on Maida. "Bad cess to ut, there's th' picture av bad luck up agin him. Sorra's the day we ivver bumped into her."

"Don't be a beast, Ginger," snapped the Sergeant.

"Luk at her hand, luk at ut. Bedad, ut's red—red wid blood." The Irish lad crossed himself swiftly. "Wirra, wirra, ut's an avil omen f'r wan av us."

The whole party was gazing at Maida Lamarde, and even Snowey felt there was some excuse for Ginger's outburst, for the sun sinking in a haze after a hot day cast a crimson shaft of light across the right hand of Maida Lamarde, the hand that grasped her dry-blowing dish.

When the little cavalcade passed the girl, none of them stopped, except the Sergeant. The other three looked at her curiously, nodded a curt greeting, and went on to McGlusky. The Sergeant dismounted and held out his hand, and as Ginger saw the two hands meet he snarled—

"Och, thin, th' sign av blood was f'r th' Sergeant; he'll never see his little Sussex village again."

McGlusky greeted his party curtly.

"Boys, A've pegged this claim, and A've sampled it on th' surface; it's no' a duffer, an' sae far as A can see, it's no' a vault o' th' Bank o' Englan'. Yon lassie's claim's a good yin, an' a spawn o' sin called Possum ower yonner ha' struck heavy gold. Noo please yer ainsel's, peg next ta ma, or peg near Possum."

"Come out av this, sorr; go above th' blinkin' Possum, or go below him, but shift out av this."

"Why, Ginger?"

The lad looked at Maida.

"Come out av ut, sorr."

"A'll no'; A've bit inta this bit o' brown earth, an' A'll chance ma luck."

The Sergeant joined them.

"I'll peg on to Miss Maida's claim on the other side, then we'll have her between us, McGlusky."

"We'd best get a move on, boss." It was Snowey who spoke. "The big valley will soon be overcrowded, an' if I have any say in th' matter, we'll stick together."

"Get at it then, buckies; no man can tell where th' gold is or where it isn't. In wi' y'r pegs."

They worked like demons. McGlusky's axe hewed pegs for them all from the timber near by, and soon they were fixed legally and securely, and not a moment too soon, for the great rush had arrived. Men with pegs under their arms and picks on their shoulders came flooding all over the place, and Ginger and the Sergeant, neither of whom had ever seen a "rush" before, got their real baptism of gold-fever on the spot.

"Hell to pay directly, Old Sport," said Snowey in his soft, lazy voice.

"Richt, buckie." McGlusky gave his orders to his party: "Each man stan' on his ain claim; dinna gae aff it, na matter wha' happens, an' dinna argue; eef any man touches y'r pegs—down him, an' dinna stan' on ceremony hoo ye dae it. Th' law an' th' richt o' it are wi' ye, fecht f'r y'r ain, eef ye must fecht."

It was magical to watch the speed with which the old and experienced prospectors put their pegs in and secured their ground. Men swarmed like ants; they came into collision, pandemonium broke loose, voices in

half a dozen languages rose in raucous shouts. Two parties would start to peg the same piece of ground, then each would try to tear the other's pegs down; short, fierce fights took place: fists, feet, pick-handles, any old thing that came handy was pressed into the battle.

"Bates a Donnybrook fair ter blazes, sorr," yelled Ginger, whose claim was next to McGlusky's.

Snowey, whose claim was on the other side of Ginger's, said—

"Shut up, kid, we'll get our share directly."

"Och, will we thin? Faith, ut's meself f'r a pick-handle."

He knocked the head off his pick as he spoke, and his eyes blazing madly, told how the wild scene around him was working on his racial instincts.

All the ground in the little valley was pegged out, and held by panting, desperate men, not a few of whom were bleeding. A big mob of disappointed diggers came down from the far end, cursing their luck. They looked ugly, and they were dangerous.

"Easy now, kid, sew y'r mouth up," counselled wise Snowey.

Like a mob of steers gone crazy, the crowd swept past and charged into the main valley, intent on uprooting pegs and getting hold of golden ground, but the reception they got from the claim-holders drove them back. A section of the more desperate or more determined rushers wheeled into the small valley again and came surging down like a storm.

"Our little honeymoon now," remarked the Sharpshooter.

The Sergeant's claim being nearest to the rushers, he was the first to strike trouble, and he met it like a lion. Some one had dropped a crowbar near his ground, and he had picked it up; six feet of iron fairly sharp at one end, is not a nice thing to face, when it is in the hands of a man who has driven a bayonet home in many a charge; no one watching the Sergeant then would have connected him with the tiny tea-shop in the little Sussex village where he had been born and raised until the World War hailed him forth. He was a Viking now, fighting for his own hand. A burly Bulgarian, of whom there are not a few in Australia, was the first to feel that crowbar, and all the gold the Queen of Sheba sent to Solomon would not have interested him for some time later. An Italian whose hand was clawing at the Sergeant's outer peg, got the full swing of the crowbar across his brawny chest, and sank down to dream of Venice, or perchance of Rome, but whatever he dreamed, he did not dream it was time to get up again—he'd have been a fool if he had, with that raging, thrusting demon with the crowbar standing over him. Gone were a thousand years of civilisation, gone like mountain mists before the sun all the lessons of church and school; the gold-bug was biting, and a blue-eyed Saxon was battling for the spoil his courage and hardihood had so richly entitled him to. Jab—jab—jab went the iron bar into a dozen faces.

That settled Ginger. Gone was all his supposed hate of the accursed Saxon; the call of comradeship took hold of his vitals; a wild Irish yell mingled with the clangorous Saxon bellow. With a rush and a whoop the imp was by the Sergeant's side, and a pick-

handle rose and fell in harmony with an iron bar, and a number of other things fell at the same time.

McGlusky, steady as a rock, had been surveying the scene until Ginger rushed into danger. Maida Lamarde was standing rigid in the middle of her fifty feet of ground, her hand resting on the butt of the gun in her belt. McGlusky strode to her.

"Haud y'r ground, A'm wantit yonner."

"You'll lose your claim, sir."

"Ta hell wi' th' claim! A canna lose ma innercent wee lamb."

Even as he spoke, his innocent wee lamb brought his pick-handle down with a clever slanting stroke on the neck of a fellow who had seized the Sergeant from behind, and Maida Lamarde, looking at the raging, tearing young Irish devil, lost much of her faith in McGlusky as a true delineator of character, for if Ginger possessed any innocence, he had left it at home that day, or mislaid it in his hurry to join the *mêlée*, as both his actions with the pick-handle and his language when a man smote him down with a shovel amply demonstrated.

McGlusky had been fighting like a reasonable human being until Ginger went down under the instrument of labour, but the scene was changed when the Irish lad fell. Like a tiger the big fellow leapt on the man who had dropped Ginger. The "jumper," a brawny Greek who had followed the sea until the gold-bug bit him, was no weakling and no coward. McGlusky locked his arms around the Greek's waist, whirled him off his feet, and giving him a heave sent him rolling out of the crowd, just as Snowey and Butterfly plunged into it,

Butterfly laughing as he fought, Snowey *nonchalant*, but deadly swift. Before the Greek could even look round for a weapon in place of the shovel he had dropped, a hairy apparition that cursed in mixed Gaelic and vivid Australian, was on top of him, dealing body blows that would have dented Nelson's column. The Greek knew little of that kind of warfare; with a a knife he would have been dangerous; he closed with the big man, and a short, fierce wrestle took place. The Greek fell.

"Get on y'r shanks, ye dommed alien. A'll learn ye ta beat th' head o' a puir Breetish wean wi' a spade."

The Greek tried to explain what the poor British wean had done to him with a pick-handle, but McGlusky was beyond the realms of argument.

"Australia is f'r Australians," he roared. "Man, ye wanted oor ground, A'll fill ye ta th' nozzle wi' it; ye shall ha' y'r share."

He rushed to Maida's pile of dirt, seized a bucketful of red clay and came pounding back to fulfil his unholy threat, but the sailor had not waited. He wanted a gold-claim, wanted one badly, but he did not want it inside himself; he ran, and some one afterwards said he did not stop until he could smell the sea.

Finding his quarry had disappeared, McGlusky plunged into the swaying crowd and dragged Ginger's inert body from under trampling feet, getting more than one goodly reminder that peace was not brooding over the scene in the process. He bore his burden into the open, and laid the red-headed image at the feet of Maida Lamarde.

"Dae wha' ye can f'r him, A'm wantit yonner;

they've got the Sergeant's claim, an' they'll ha' this yin next."

"They won't."

As the girl spoke, she jerked her gun from its holster and threw back her head.

As McGlusky charged back to join Snowey and the others, the big staghound that had been tied in the tent broke its tether and came bounding to Maida's side, its fangs bare, every hair bristling.

Snowey went down from a hefty stroke, and the Sergeant, though nearly spent, flung a leg across the fallen body, and fought more fiercely than ever. McGlusky's band had been driven back from the first claim, and were on Maida's ground now. A couple of fellows, eager to grasp the prize, dashed at her left-hand peg. She lifted her gun, and without a moment's hesitation, fired. They had not reckoned on this, for before the great war the gun was seldom seen on any Anzac mining camp. The shot halted them, and when the second bullet cut up the earth at their feet, they fell back. Some others ran to another of her pegs, but she levelled her gun, and one glance in her direction told all beholders she was not bluffing. Had a man been holding that gun, the crowd would have risked it and rushed, but the sight of a girl defending her own shamed them. McGlusky, ever keen in a crisis, seized the moment.

"Ye cooards, ye dommed jackal pack, ta plun'er a wumman's claim fra' her. Yon's mine, there where ma banner flies—coom an' tak' it—eef ye can."

He strode across the few intervening yards and placed himself under his banner. Butterfly stooped, picked

Snowey up, and he and the Sergeant joined the grim old Viking, who stood with blood dripping through his iron-grey hair over one cheek on to his bare shoulders, for his singlet had been riven from him in the fray. At that moment the wind lifted the "banner," the shirt bellied out and revealed itself for what it was.

"Ma name's McGlusky—an' yon's ma stan'ard."

The crowd gazed: the grotesqueness of it all smote them; their anger and greed of gold fled before that gaily-striped shirt flaunting in the breeze. A great shout of laughter rent the sultry air, and men who a moment before had been ripe for any devilment, caught hold of one another and rocked with merriment. This seemed to anger the veteran more than all that had gone before.

"Dae ye tak' me f'r a Punch and Judy show?"

"Well," drawled a fellow in the front rank, whose bruised and swollen face backed his words, "you've got a punch, Old Sport, I'll go bail f'r that."

"They've got Judy too," shouted another rough wag, "an' a thunderin' good-lookin' one."

Maida smiled at the crude jest, and being a wise little woman, slipped her gun back in its holster and knelt and lifted Ginger's head on to her lap.

"Hope th' kid ain't badly damaged, Miss."

It was the fellow with the bruised face who spoke.

"He was blamed promiscuous with his pick-handle before he got his little lot," interjected another, "but he's some scrapper."

Ginger lifted his wounded head, gazed around him vacantly for a bit, and then took in the rough bronzed faces all around him.

"Glory be! Oi thought Oi was in hivin—ut was a lovely mix-up while ut lasted."

He smiled his all-enveloping smile, and rose and mixed with his late enemies as unconcernedly as if the whole show had been something worked up for the "pictures."

In the end it was Ginger who got the Sergeant's ground back, by a fine effort of romantic improvisation. He was talking of the war to the crowd, and said in an off-hand manner—

"The blinkin' Sergeant's English; Oi'm Irish, but I fought with th' Anzacs all through, an' becase av what th' Sergeant did f'r th' Anzacs at Gallipoli, we *had* ter fight f'r him to-day."

"What did he do particular, son?" asked a bystander.

"Do!" Ginger opened his wonderful eyes to their widest. Then he let a far-away expression creep into them, as if he were seeing things in his sleep. "There was a company av us left ter hold a bally hill which we had tuk at th' point av th' bayonit; most av our troops was called back f'r some blinkin' foolishness or other, an' we had ter hang on to ut. We ran out av water, an' ut was so hot none av us cud spit on a wound ter kape it moist; we wud ha' perished, we wud that, f'r it was not th' Anzac way ter surrender, an'—an', boys, them blighters in charge clane forgot all about us, but that Sergeant he didn't disremember us, an' he knew we had no water—Oi'm Irish, an' Oi don't love th' Englis' on gineral principles, but Oi like this wan."

Ginger had cut his story off with fine dramatic effect, and was moving away.

"Tell us what the Sergeant did, kid."

"Him? Oh, he loaded up a mule wid skins av water, an' brung it to us under fire, an' got courtmartialled f'r actin' widout orders, an' was put back in th' blinkin' ranks, but he won his stripes afterwards. He saved an' Anzac comp'ny, that's all."

"All," growled one of the jumpers. "Why in hell didn't you tell us about that at first, instead of—of arguin' th' point with a pick-handle, kid? No one here wants that chap's claim, eh, boys?"

None of them did. They went away like lambs to seek for gold-claims higher up and lower down, and Ginger sat down and filled his pipe, when a slow soft voice drawled—

"Say, son, do you think there's a better single-handed liar on th' crust o' th' planet than you?"

"Why, Snowey?"

"Because th' Sergeant wasn't at Gallipoli at all, he was in Mesopotamia."

"Fade out, Snowey, ye're disturbin' me reflections. Oi was goin' ter call that 'Chapter I' an' finish ut 'To be continued in our next issue.'"

"Th' Sergeant will boot you when he hears of it."

"Oi wudden't be surprised if he did. Every great author gets more kicks than ha'pence at th' beginnin' av his career," was the unblushing rejoinder. "Anyway, Snowey, Oi got th' blinkin' claim back widout any more fightin'. Oi've had all th' fightin' Oi want till me next birthday."

Snowey told McGlusky the story—with reservations. Said he, Ginger, told that mob what a brick the Sergeant was in the fighting-line, and they decided to

give the Sergeant's claim a miss in baulk. The pioneer glowed with pride in his *protégé*.

"He's great, ma wee mannie is just great; he kens hoo ta touch th' hairt-strings o' a fechtin' breed like th' Anzacs, Snowey. Sometimes we air apt ta be hard on him, we think he's no' as particular in his han'lin' o' th' truth as he micht be, but, Snowey, it's ma firm belief Ginger wad never tell a lee f'r th' sake o' gold or gear; he just mak's word pictures an' believes 'em."

"So did I—once," murmured Snowey, "till I knew Ginger."

"At hairt," said the pioneer, "ma wee mannie is as innocent as a young magpie."

Never a trace of a smile dawned on the Sharpshooter's stern young face, for he knew how dear the Irish lad was to the man who had found him in the gutter and made a man of him, and Snowey would not have hurt McGlusky for all the tea in China. All he said was—

"Yes, Mac, th' kid's right enough—in spots, an' if ever I find a magpie as innocent as Ginger, I'll—I'll paint it pink an' call it Jacob."

The party were left in undisputed possession of their claims, and soon work was in full swing and no men toiled harder than they, but from the outset it seemed as if they had struck by far the worst patch in "Little Valley." This was especially peculiar, as Maida's claim lay right between McGlusky's and the Sergeant's, neither of whom could make much more than a bare living, whilst the girl got a lot of both fine and shotty gold. Snowey and Ginger got a modest amount of metal; Butterfly Brown, however, got far the best of any of the party, and even he did not score too heavily.

McGlusky's yield was the worst of the lot. They had about fourteen feet of earth to sink through to reach bed rock, and what gold there was was distributed at random in this: sometimes they found it near the surface, sometimes at the bottom or in the middle; there was no true lode, the metal was just peppered at random in any old place.

"We'll ha' ta work out every blessed inch o' 't, buckies; eef we leave any, th' bit we leave may hold th' yellow metal."

That was the veteran's dictum, and Snowey supplemented it by saying—

"Work it? What else are we here for? You never know y'r blinkin' luck in big towns, an' you don't on a gold-claim. The next shovelful o' dirt any of us shifts ter-morrow may have a nugget in it as big as th' one French Charley found this morning."

"Och, sorr, Oi don't mind diggin' an' Oi don't mind shovellin', ut's workin' th' dirt from wan dish ter th' other that makes me tired, ut's—ut's so slow, sorr."

"Y're right, mannie, an' A'm goin' ta th' store tomorrow ta buy some tools an' a bit timber, an' some fine-mesh wire, an' A'll mak' as good a machine f'r dry-blowin' as you'd buy f'r money, an' A'll mak' yin f'r each o' us, then we'll no' need th' dom dishes, we'll get through mair dirt in a day that way than we dae now in a week, an' save mair gold."

True to his promise, McGlusky built a "dry-blowing machine"; it was rough to the eye, but it worked. Then he started out to make one each for his mates, but could get no leather for the large pair of bellows each dry-blower required.

"Stumped, sorr?"

"A'm no', Ginger; A'll cut up a pair o' breeks an' use th' material instead o' leather."

"How mony pairs av breeks will yez be wantin', sorr?"

"Aboot three pairs f'r each bellows, buckie."

"We've wan pair apiece, sorr, an' wid a lady livin' adjacent Oi'm bate if Oi see how ut's ter be done."

McGlusky pondered over the problem, then a happy smile lit up his rugged face.

"A ha' it, buckies! A'll mak' kilts f'r ye all oot o' oor blankets."

Butterfly Brown smiled his evergreen smile, and said—

"Listen a-here, Mac, I'd shore do most anything to please you, but it's strainin' th' bonds o' friendship to th' tearin' point to ask a man to waltz around in a blanket petticoat. All th' boys in th' gully would shore guy us till we'd have ter throw our guns on 'em in self-defence; if we wear them graceful petticoats, we'll have some guy come courtin' us, or—or writin' poetry at us."

That night Snowey, Ginger, the Sergeant and Butterfly held a council of war to concoct a scheme to defeat McGlusky's tailoring enterprise, but plan how they would, they could hit on no feasible scheme.

"It's no use, mates," sighed Snowey, "if he says he'll dress us in feather bonnets, he'll do it, but I can see a hell of a time in front of us with the 'boys' raisin' their hats polite-like, an' sayin' 'Good-evenin', Miss, can I take you for a ramble by moonlight?'"

"It's clean agen natur'," growled Butterfly, "but th' worst of it is, he thinks he's doin' us a favour."

"Och," chuckled Ginger, "what do yez think he was doin' when Oi peeped at him in camp just now?"

They gave it up, and demanded enlightenment.

"He was cuttin' up his own breeks ter mak' th' linin' f'r a dry-blower f'r Snowey!"

"That's him all over, the dear old devil. Well, after that, he can dress me in a pocket-handkerchief if he wants to," commented Snowey.

"Gosh," murmured Butterfly, "what will he look like ter-morrow? He has made a banner out of his shirt, an' bellows out o' his breeks!"

Ginger said nothing; he simply rose and drifted out into the night, and as he went he hummed a Scottish air.

"What's th' kid up to?" queried the Sergeant.

"Dunno f'r sure, matey," cooed Snowey, "but when that Irish pup croons Scotch music, he's sure got some devilment afoot. I wouldn't wonder if some gent in this gully is some short in his wardrobe when he wakes in th' mornin'."

CHAPTER VII

LIFE IN A SUCCESSFUL GOLD-CAMP

LATE that night Snowey heard some one tip-toeing over his claim. He rose from his blankets, and saw Ginger stealing towards his own ground.

"Halt there, son."

"Dry up, Snowey." Ginger crept stealthily back and entered the Sharpshooter's tent; he had a bundle under one arm. "Why can't yez slape dacent? Ye've eyes in y'r ears, Snowey."

"What's that, son?"

Snowey touched the bundle as he spoke.

"Do yez remember th' first piece av advice yerself gave me at Gallipoli, Snowey?"

"No; I've sure wasted a lot on you at intervals."

"Ye told me ter learn ter mind me own business, pal."

"Have you been lootin' tents, Ginger? It's th' unpardonable sin on our goldfields; th' 'boys' might forgive you f'r bushrangin' under certain circumstances, they'd never forgive you for sneakin' into a tent."

"Oi didn't," growled Ginger. "Oi druv a nail through a long stick an' pushed th' stick wid th' nail end ready f'r accidents into Possum's tent."

"Oh, did you? What happened?"

"This happened." Ginger displayed a pair of very

soiled moleskin trousers. "Thim things was lyin' by Possum, an' him snorin' ter bate th' band."

"Well?"

"Don't spake ter me as if Oi was a thafe."

The imp put a world of grievance into his tones.

"Go on with your yarn."

"Well, Oi wanted me stick back, didn't Oi? So Oi pulled ut out, an' yez may belave me or not, Snowey, them pants had got tangled up wid th' nail Oi'd druv through me stick, an' Oi—Oi got scared, an' Oi come away."

"And brought Possum's pants with you."

"Faith, Oi don't belave he'll miss 'em, he's th' dirtiest divil Oi've seen since Oi left Agypt. Oi don't belave he's had a bath f'r a year av Christmases."

Snowey turned over the bundle, and found a second pair of nether garments.

"And these, Ginger?"

"Och, thim"—the imp tried to speak airily—"thim wans belonged ter Possum's mate, him that shares th' same tent wid Possum, an' Oi've a right to 'em. Didn't Possum an' his mate try ter jump th' Auld Timer's claim when he was here on his lonesome?"

"Where did you learn that trick with the pole with a nail through the end of it?"

"Oi wasn't in th' Army f'r nothin'," retorted Ginger. "Oi learnt a lot av things besides dhrill when Oi was sojerin'. Wan night Oi was on sentry-go in front av a canteen in France."

"Yes."

"Th' canteen was a big tent, Snowey."

"Bite into your yarn."

"Near dawn I seen things comin' out from under th' rim av th' tent."

"What sort o' things?"

"All sorts, an' no wan wid 'em."

"You young liar."

"Oi'm not. Th' first thing Oi saw come out was a loaf av bread, then a ham, an' thim things was chased by a cheese."

"Fade out, Ginger; Ananias was a raw recruity compared to you at dodgin' th' truth."

"Oi didn't know th' gent ye call Ananias, Snowey; was he—an Australian?"

The Sharpshooter picked up a chunk of rock.

"Now get on with your serial story, Ginger, and if you make it too steep, I'll—I'll shore punctuate it with this."

"Oi don't want no help, ut's th' Gospel truth Oi'm tellin' ye, pal."

"Did anything chase that cheese, Ginger?"

"Yes, Oi did, an' in th' shadow av th' tent Oi fell over one av thim coolies from India that we had doin' odd jobs an'—an' interruptin' th' scenery."

"Couldn't see him, I suppose, till you fell over him?"

"Oi cudden't; he was just th' colour av th' shadow he was lyin' in. Oi grabbed him, an' Oi asked him how many pals he had inside th' canteen shovin' things out, an' he said: 'The Sahib is mistaken, Oi have only this,' an' he showed me a long bamboo wid a nail through th' end av ut, an', Snowey——"

"Well?"

"Oi assimilated that knowledge, ut was part av th' friuts av thravel."

"Did you—assimilate—th' cheese too, you scut?"

"Only half av ut," sighed Ginger. "Th' haythin wouldn't part up wid th' lot."

"A nice sentry you were," sneered Snowey.

"Well, matey," giggled Ginger, "you had y'r share av that same cheese, an' Oi disremember you raisin' any throuble over how Oi came by ut. Now stop jawin' me, an' help me cut these pants so as no one will know if they was trousies or—or part av a bridal trousseau."

When Ginger gave the result of his own and Snowey's handiwork to the veteran the following morning, the big man clapped him on the shoulder.

"Where did ye get it frae, ma mannie? It's just gran', moleskin's maist as good as leather."

"Oi got ut from a man who had no use f'r ut, sorr; anyway, Oi didn't pay him much f'r ut."

"A hope ye didna drive too hard a bargain, buckie; perhaps th' puir de'il were out o' luck."

"Oi paid what he asked, sorr, no more, no less."

"Tha's fair, mannie, tha's fair; there's enough here ta mak' a bellows f'r Butterfly's dry-blower. A've made Snowey's oot o' ma ain; y'r ain breeks 'll mak' a fine bellows f'r y'r machine; A'll start on them th' nicht."

And up in Possum's camp two breechless men were calling on all the gods they had ever heard of to blight the eyes and the astral body of the sneak thief who had broken the most sacred of diggers' laws.

"I've had me boots 'shook,' an' me blinkin' hat, an' me spurs," wailed Possum, "but this is th' first time I've been done f'r me pants. I'll sleep in mine f'r th' future; this here civilisation's too rapid f'r me."

When McGlusky had finished the dry-blowing machines for his party, they were able to turn over the dirt in their claims at a great rate, for the machines, uncouth as they looked, acted as sieves and the improvised bellows blew the dust away. All the woodwork Mac had secured from packing-cases purchased at the stores, of which there were now quite a few, for Australian provision and tool-sellers are quick on the uptake when alluvial gold is struck, for such gold is current coin, and is taken as payment for goods quite as readily as the minted metal, and no men squander their hard-won wealth so recklessly as diggers.

Soon the whole valley lay from dawn till dusk in a thick haze of reddish dust, stirred up by the gold-seekers; each claim turned out its quota, and the toiling men looked like ghosts in the midst of it; they breathed it as they slaved, and as the sweat ran off their bodies in the gully which had now become an inferno with savage heat and choking dust and maddening flies. They cursed, but they worked, for the wide world owns no men who can stand the strain of desperate toil like the men of Anzac; they work as they fight and as they play, with every ounce of fibre that is in them—a great breed, destined yet to become the masters of the world. Most of the claim-holders in both gulleys were either Australians or New Zealanders; they had got the claims in the valleys because they knew the game better than the foreigners; these latter folk had to be content with what they could peg out on the flats on both sides of the valleys; they got gold, but not in anything like the same proportion, for the rains of centuries had washed the richest of the metal into the

lowest country; where water goes, alluvial gold will follow in the course of time, though it may take ages.

Of all the men in the gulleys, none worked harder than McGlusky's party. At the peep of dawn he was up, getting his breakfast, and he always roused the others, which caused Butterfly Brown to remark with an expansive grin—

"Th' old bird shore don't believe in dallyin' with th' goddess o' sleep to any wasteful extent."

To which Ginger grumblingly assented, saying—

"Him? Och, but he's got a cockerel inside av him that crows whin darkness is whisperin' good-bye ter th' daylight. If Oi was a wench, Oi wudden't be his wife f'r a two-headed penny."

After a frugal breakfast, the toil of the day began, and did not end until daylight disappeared. McGlusky had ascertained that from fifteen to twenty feet of earth lay above the bed-rock on their claims, and that meant that each of his party had to dig up fifty feet square of stiff red earth to that depth, pulverise it, and put it through their machines, and extract the gold. Their luck varied from day to day; sometimes they did moderately well, but they did not strike a single big nugget between them, though Maida Lamarde working so near them, dug up several fine nuggets, and men not far away did even better than the lass.

"It's th' uncertainty o' th' game tha' gie's it its charm; it's a gran' gamble wi' fate, buckies," said the pioneer one night in camp.

"Bedad, thin, is ut, sorr? Ut's meself wud part wid a bit av that same uncertainty wid gladness f'r a few av

thim eight an' ten ounce bits av gold those beyant are gettin'."

"Grousin', wee mannie?"

"Well, sorr, Oi've made a pile av dust as big as a house, an' me packet av gold is so small ut blushes wid shame when Oi look at ut."

"You've got th' joy o' work, kid," cooed Snowey, who had proved the unluckiest of the lot, with the exception of the veteran.

Ginger's lip curled.

"Work? Me back's bruk, me hands blistered, th' sun has peeled half th' skin off me, an' th' flies have made homes f'r their eggs in th' other half; Oi'm so full av dust Oi can't spit, an' Oi can't find me face f'r dirt, widout th' help av a bit av hoop iron ter scrape ut. Work—if Oi ever see that word again in print, Oi'll burn th' book." Then springing to his feet he cried: "You an' y'r work! Oi'm goin' on a tare, Oi am. What do ye say to a night out, Butterfly? Oi can hear music in th' big valley."

"Wonder if they've got a billiard table up yet; I'm shore pinin' f'r a little loosenin' up o' th' springs o' pleasure, son."

The American stretched his long limbs, and looked round on his comrades with the smile that never seemed far from the surface.

"Most sure to have by now," commented Snowey.

"I wonder," ventured the Sergeant, "if a man could buy a bottle of real beer, or is it too early to expect any yet?"

"Man, y're daft: A'll wager ma kilt there's twenty drinkin'-shanties in Canvas Toon th' noo, an' beer enouch ta swim a whale in."

"I'm not a whale, Mac," replied the Englishman gently, "but if there really is beer in the big valley, I'm going to get outside a pint or two of it before I sleep to-night. I'm like Ginger, I'm so full of dust I can't spit."

"A'm no' blamin' ye, laddies: y're young, an' th' young canna stan' th' strain o' ceaseless work like men o' ma ain age who ha' been hammered hard by th' passin' years. A felt weak an' worn oot like ye air feelin' noo—yince."

"If any one else told me that," put in Butterfly in his droll way, "I'd shore make conversation on his pedigree. I don't believe you ever was real tired, Old Sportsman; you never was born, you were made out of scrap-iron in a blacksmith's shop."

"Come to Canvas Town with us, Mac, an' have a bit of a razzle, come an' see th' sights."

"A've seen 'em all sae often, Snowey."

"Oi wudden't come, sorr, if Oi was you."

The Sergeant made a vicious kick at Ginger's shin in a surreptitious way, for the speech seemed so heartless after all the veteran had done for his party.

"Why no', mannie?"

Every ear caught the note of pain in the rugged old prospector's voice.

"Oi'd hate ter see yez get hurted, sorr."

"Ma—get hurtit?"

A smile had taken the place of the frown that had crossed Snowey's face when Ginger had first spoken. The Sharpshooter knew the Irish imp was manœuvring the veteran to make him have a night out.

"Have yez forgotten Mister Rooney, sorr? He's here somewhere, an' if ye meet him——"

Up rose McGlusky.

"Wee laddie, A had clean forgotten Rooney; he gave ma an eenvitation ta ca' on him, did he no'? It wad no' be manners befittin' Jamie de McGlusky, Chevalier o' Eetaly, no' ta respond ta it."

"Ye've no throusies, sorr."

"A've ma kilt an' a pair o' boots."

"Ye've no shirt, sorr. Shall Oi pull down y'r banner?"

"Ye will no'. A've a singlet an' a jacket." He strapped his broad leather belt round his waist, jammed a big Colt into its holster. "Noo," he cried, "A'm feelin' fat an' fine; eef A meet Mr. Rooney, A'll gie him a ceevil reminder o' th' bit misun'erstan'in' atween us; eef he uses his han's, A'll dae ma best ta leeve up ta ma patent o' nobeelity; eef he goes f'r his gun, A'll shoot his eyelashes off; if th' rest o' his head goes wi' 'em, it's his look-out—walk roon' ma, buckies; hoo dae A look?"

Ginger walked round him, and noticed the home-made kilt, manufactured out of a coarse blue blanket; it only reached to the veteran's knees. He noticed also the great sinewy, hairy legs guiltless of stockings. He noticed, too, the splendid shoulders, that sloped and gave the arms the driving power of piston rods, and the waist that tapered as the waist of the perfect athlete always does.

"Och, sorr, Oi nivver seen anything like yerself; ut's fit f'r a ballroom yez are this blessed minute."

"Na, na," came the modest answer, "no' f'r a ball-room, buckie, till A ha' a bath, but A'm theenkin' A'm no' sae bad f'r a goldfields' bar-room an' a dance wi' Mister Rooney."

Ginger was buckling on his gun.

"Leave that in camp, kid."

"Why shud Oi? You've got y'r own on, Snowey."

"Because I know th' rules of Australian mining camps, an' you don't, son—this ain't Gallipoli; if you throw a gun here, except in self-defence, you'll swing, an,' kid——"

"What is ut?"

"You wouldn't look graceful on the end of a rope."

"Snowey's richt. All o' ye leave y'r guns in camp; me an' yon laddie wull tak' our guns because we know when it's lawfu' to use 'em."

Soon the little party set out, and on the way the Sergeant managed to get Ginger to himself.

"I'm sorry, lad, I put my boot on your shin in camp; I thought you were turning the Old Sportsman down," said the Englishman.

"When y're in doubt agin, plaze ter disremember ter boot me, Sergeant—not that Oi'm blamin' y'r f'r kickin' me if ye thought Oi was playin' it down low on him; Oi'd deserve more'n a boot if Oi played th' skunk wid th' Auld Timer; he dry-nursed me when Oi was a gutter-rat, an' he licked me into shape as a soger an' a man, an' now he's thryin' ter make a bushman out av me, an' *he* thinks a bushman is th' noblest work av God—when he's sober."

"I knew, lad, as soon as you mentioned Rooney, what your game was; you know how to work him as a woman knows how to work a sewin'-machine; listen to him now, laughin' with Butterfly an' Snowey, he's as happy as a sandpiper; he's glad to know we want him in our pleasures as well as in our work. A night out on the tiles will do him no end of good."

"He's as full av fun an' divilment as a two-year-old, Sergeant; th' joy av life's in ivery bone in his body; he'll be a great big boy whin he's a hundred an' ten, an'——" Just then a great rollicking burst of laughter broke from McGlusky, to whom Butterfly had been telling one of his whimsical stories of American life. "Hark to him," exulted Ginger, "listen ter th' laugh av him. If Oi can laugh like that when Oi have whiskers wid more grey hairs than black in 'em, Oi won't have no regrets comin' ter me concernin' a misspent youth."

"He's got honey in his heart, lad, that's what makes life so sweet to him."

"It's not all honey; he's a mixture; he's like a bottle av patent medicine, yez have ter shake him up ter find out what's at th' bottom. Wud yez like ter make a little wager, Sergeant darlin'?"

"What about?"

"O'll bet ye a dozen packets av fags, Mister Rooney don't think th' old cock-bird has honey in his heart if they meet to-night."

"I don't bet against certs, you whelp; try another."

When the party reached Canvas Town, they found night-life in full swing. Some one had named the main thoroughfare "Republican Highway," which caused Ginger to remark after his first visit that the name was too long by one syllable.

"Why didn't they christen ut 'Publican Highway,' an' have done wid ut?"

Asked for reasons, he declared you could purchase alcohol in one form or another in every third shop from end to end of the causeway.

"Oi went into a tent wid a sign on ut which said ut was a chemist's shop, an' Oi saw six-foot-six of humanity in a grey tweed suit, foolin' wid a lot av medicin' bottles an' ointments an' stickin'-plaster. Faith, he was a tall man, that medicine dispenser," ruminated Ginger, "an' Oi think he'd been so busy growing long, he hadn't time ter think av growin' wide too, he was so narrow across th' body av him, that if he'd had one leg planted in th' middle av him, ut would have done instead av havin' wan on each side like me an' you. Th' thickest thing about him was his brogue; he was as Irish as wan av th' Kilkenny cats. Oi axed him f'r a drop av somethin' ter rub on me face, ter take th' sun blisters out av ut, an' he winked at me. 'Oi'll prescribe f'r y'r complaint,' sez he, 'half-a-dollar, cash in advance.' Oi planked down th' coin, an' he took a black bottle out av a hole in th' ground, an' poured me out a stiff dose av uts contents. 'Dhrink that, me son,' sez he, 'an' be thankful yez came ter me instead av goin' ter th' store beyant, it's chain lightnin' in a bottle ye'd got there.' 'Och,' sez Oi, 'ut's whisky ye've given me.' 'Faith, an' ye never spoke a thruer word, me bould boy, whisky ut is, an' th' best in Australia.' 'Pour ut back in th' bottle, Mister medicine man,' sez Oi wid dignity, 'Oi don't touch th' stuff, Oi'm a water-waggoner.' He tuk th' stuff back an' looked at it long an' lovingly. 'Pour ut back in th' bottle,' sez he, 'Oi'll not; Oi'd not insult what's left in th' bottle by lettin' it know ut had been refused by a kid wid a mouth like a cemetery an' a head av hair like a hayrick afire.' An' wid that he gave his arm a crook, an' threw th' whisky down his

neck; bedad, he was clever at ut, Oi don't think ut touched anywhere till ut hit th' bottom av his stummick. 'Oi'm havin' that wid you,' he sez in a grand way, as if he was payin' me a compliment by drinkin' at my expense. An' ut was most th' same everywhere else Oi went; if Oi axed f'r ink, they'd push a bottle of whisky at me, an' drop an eyelid. They *may* have lived on other things in that street, but whisky was the main article av diet; I wudden't wonder if they'd learnt ter tak ut baked or boiled. When Oi asked th' price av a saddle at wan shop, th' blighter in charge tucked a big jar under his arm an' began pourin' whisky into a pannikin. 'How will yez have ut?' sez he. 'Three fingers or a brimmer?'"

The McGlusky party felt the thrill of Republican Highway as soon as they entered it, for, as the Sergeant remarked, they were all fed up and strung tight with hard work, hard living, and stern travail. The Highway was wide, as thoroughfares always are in such places, to allow teams to pass without crowding or getting into the big ruts that are soon worn in unmacadamised roads. Tents were greatly in evidence on both sides, but here and there an ugly galvanised-iron structure upreared itself, hideous to the eye, blistering hot in summer, a miniature refrigerator in winter; but the material is easily carried on camel-back, and stacks better than anything else in waggons. Bough shanties with tarpaulin roofs were also common. One big galvanised-iron and weatherboard building was the dance-hall of the "rush," and a very large canvas marquee was used for athletic entertainments. The principal hotel flaunted the sign of The Three

Sparrows, possibly because the size of a "nip" sold there for a shilling would have just suited the carrying capacity of one of those enterprising birds. Right opposite The Three Sparrows stood The Kangaroo and Emu Hostel, and a few yards farther down on the left-hand side The Lucky Digger. As specimens of architecture they would not have taken prizes even in a city of the dead, but they had been rushed up in a hurry, and if the field proved permanent, they would soon be replaced by handsome edifices of brick or stone.

McGlusky and his friends could not see many women about, but the Highway was thronged with men. The first person to address them was a black child of the soil, whose raiment if rolled into a ball, would not have plugged a man's ear. Straight of hair, slender and straight of figure, with eyes like a spaniel's and wonderful teeth, this nomadic daughter of the wilds looked curiously out of place amid the roar and bustle of the white man's camp.

"Gib it a chillin'."

A slender, shapely hand, indescribably dirty, was thrust out in Ginger's direction.

"Always a fav'rite with th' ladies, kid," chuckled Snowey.

"What is ut sayin'?"

Ginger had drawn back from the extended hand.

"She's askin' ye f'r a shillin'; gie her yin, wee mannie."

"Och, an' what for, sorr?"

"Weel, buckie, eef ma een an' ma nose air any good as guides, A should say f'r a bath. A'm no' theenkin' she'll ha' one, but by ma whuskers, she needs it, an,

mannie, we white fowk ha' taken her country frae her an' her people, an' dom little ha' we done f'r any o' them, we whites air th' most self-righteous humbugs an' hypocrites on God's planet."

Ginger gave the dole, as the old Scottish Anzac had commanded. The nomad gripped it in her left hand, and pushed out the right hand towards McGlusky.

"Gib it terbaccer."

"A kenned weel tha' wad come next."

As he spoke the Scot, who like nearly all men of Scottish blood, had a great big streak of generosity in him, tossed half a plug of good tobacco into the "gin's" hand. Butterfly watching the episode, laughed.

"Noble red man over again, only painted black, Mac."

Quick as a flash, the "gin" turned on the Yank.

"Gib it beer, Mister."

"Na, na, tha's no' lawfu' an' no' richt either, though A ken there's white trash who dae it. A'd gie ye some claes eef A——"

"Sorr——"

"Weel, Ginger?"

"Why not give her y'r kilt, ut's——"

"Ma kilt, ye blastie? An' wha' wad A look wi'oot it? A'm no' a bird, A'm no' feathered, an' we air in Republican Highway, we——"

"Och, sorr, we tuk th' poor divil's counthry, an'——"

A sudden swing of one of McGlusky's long legs helped Ginger very materially in the direction of The Three Sparrows.

"That settles it," drawled Snowey. "I was wonderin' which pub we'd sample first; come on, Sergeant, before the beer gets cold."

Inside The Three Sparrows they found a crowd of hilarious men drinking, joking, and generally making a night of it. There was plenty of rough horse-play, but no ill-humour. An Italian was playing the harp, and from time to time sent the hat round, and if he was not satisfied with the result, he ought to have been.

The McGlusky contingent slaked their thirst, each in his own peculiar beverage, and then took in the scene. Some one noticed Mac's kilt, and shouted—

"Hullo, Scottie, brought y'r bagpipes with you, eh?"

The big fellow knew it was only friendly banter, and smiled as he shouted back—

"Na, buckie, no' th' nicht." Then, in an aside to Snowey: "Ma certie, A'll tak' that hint an' mak' a set o' pipes; it wad dae na harm eef they had a wee bit o' guid Christian music here."

"What's wrong with th' harp, Old Sport?"

"Naething exactly wrang wi' it, but it just tum—tum—tums a' th' time, it doesna' grup hold o' y'r innards; a fiddle's no' sa bad when it squeals an' screeches an' sobs an' yowls like a wumman wailin' f'r her stolen washin', but gie ma th' pipes, they'll mak' a cooard fecht when they hit th' high places, an' when they're sobbin' soft an' low, they'll mak' a burglar weep f'r a misspent life. Yon blastie wi' th' harp means weel, but he ainly scratches at th' skin o' y'r feelin's."

"Wisht we cud lay hands on some pipes, sorr; we'd

do a grand parade down Republican Highway," exclaimed Ginger, in whom the leaven of devilment was working, as it always worked when a crowd bent on hilarity was round.

One of the girls behind the bar had noticed the Irish lad's beautiful eyes, and having a moment to spare just then, she leant across the bar and said with a jolly laugh—

"Say, boy, did you steal those eyes out of a bed of violets, or did a pixie drop them out of the sky?"

Ginger dropped one of his sun-tanned hands on the girl's soft white fingers, and imprisoned them.

"It's a sacret," he whispered, his eyes dancing with the riotous life within him.

"Can't you tell it me, boy?"

"Oi can, an' Oi will, if—if ye'll meet me by moonlight on y'r lonesome."

"I—I can't," murmured the girl.

"Och, darlint, an' why can't yez?"

"I—I might be charged with kidnapping, boy."

She jerked her fingers free, and stood back to enjoy his discomfiture.

"Ever been had, Ginger?" drawled Snowey.

Some of the men standing near began to banter the lad in the free and easy way of the back country, and his quick return shots and the attendant laughter soon made him the centre of a jovial crowd. They pressed him to drink.

"Oi'm a water-waggoner," he replied, and tossed his red head back as if to face down any ridicule that might follow this declaration in such a place; but a burly giant of a man in the crowd growled—

"Shows y'r blinkin' sense, young 'un; pity some of us ain't got a slice of it."

The good-looking barmaid, who had previously chaffed him, touched his shoulder—

"Plenty of soft drinks here, if you want 'em, boy."

"Is there? Well, give me th' coolest ye've got, an' —an' drop a smile in ut—Oi'm—Oi'm fond av pearls."

"Say, young 'un," interpolated the burly man who had spoken in friendly fashion when Ginger had announced himself as a water-waggoner, "you'll be buyin' a peck o' trouble if you go on dropping those flowers o' speech at Annie Laurie's feet."

"Why will he, Jim?"

The query snapped from the girl's lips like shot from a sporting gun.

The man called Jim grinned.

"What about Diamond Jake, eh, Annie Laurie?"

"Well, what about him? You got any shares in Diamond Jake, Jim?"

"Not a cent's worth; if I had I'd sell 'em cheap."

"Well, sew your mouth up, Jim."

"Say, young 'un, did you ask Annie Laurie f'r a 'cool' drink?"

"Oi did."

"Well, 'pears to me she's too all-fired hot ter-night to get it for you, unless——" he grinned good-humouredly, "unless you're going to be the white-headed boy in these particular regions."

The girl threw a champagne cork at the speaker, and Ginger, fascinated by the lassie's nickname, began to hum a bar or two of the old Scotch ballad of the same name.

Instantly a shout arose: "A song, a song—silence for a song," and the Irish lad was hustled across the bar to the side of the harpist.

There was nothing shy about Ginger, and if there was one thing on earth he loved doing more than all else, it was singing.

"Why do they call th' girl Annie Laurie? Ut's not her name," he asked the burly Jim.

"Because she's always hummin' it when she's workin'. Say, are you any great shakes as a song-bird, young 'un?"

"Oi can warble a bit. Why?"

"Only because Diamond Jake fancies he's th' lost chord in vocal harmony come ter light again; that's why he got a sort o' cinch on Annie; he's marked her off as his claim, an' he hangs out a sort o' unofficial notice sayin' 'Stand off th' grass.' He gives himself airs in regard to Annie, Diamond Jake does."

"Och, does he, Jim? An' what's th' gent's best song?"

"Why, that blessed Scotch thing th' boys have tacked on ter th' girl, an' he don't mean any one else ter sing it—not in this emporium of thirst destruction."

"Does he sing ut well?"

"I'm no judge o' voice acrobatics, but it don't hurt much when Diamond Jake sings it, it ain't as bad as hearin' a kid cry while mother's doin' th' washin'. There's Diamond Jake now, speakin' ter th' girl; he's just come in; notice how he's engulfin' her with his charms, sort of 'staked-out-an'-leased-this-claim' sort o' attitude he adopts."

Ginger whispered to the Italian harpist; the harp

strings twanged melodiously, and Ginger's voice, sweeter and richer than honeysuckle honey, swept through the big bar, and gripped every man and woman in it. The Italian, who was a real musician, gave one swift upward look at the singer, then his fingers softened on the harp-strings. The crowd was a rough one, but perhaps on that very account tender sentiment, when beautifully rendered, touched them to the quick; they stood motionless, each man in the pose in which the boy's voice had found him, some with glasses of liquor half raised to lips, some grasping foaming pots of beer, others with matches lifted to light their pipes, some leaning against the bar, others seated at little round rough tables, some were bearded, some clean-shaven, a few had donned jackets after their day of toil, but the majority were in shirts and trousers, the shirt-sleeves rolled up above the bronzed elbows.

Ginger had not glanced at the girl behind the bar when he first began to sing, but when he reached the words—

> "An' for bonnie Annie Laurie
> I wad lay me doon an' dee,"

the Irish imp seemed to fling his eyes full in her face—magical, wonderful eyes, at the best, or worst, of times, but when backed by the expression he threw into them, and by the haunting melody of the old ballad, they were, as Butterfly phrased it, "Two lamps o' love, warranted ter draw a nun through the keyhole of any cloister," and the lass behind the bar was not a nun.

When the first verse ended, a riot of acclamation broke out. The harpist let his fingers drop from the

harp strings, and his voice rang out in a stentorian "Brava, Signor, brava."

Ginger was not listening to the applause; he had expected it, for he knew the power of his gift; his eyes were talking to the girl's eyes, just as if he had known and loved her for a lifetime, and her eyes seemed to melt into his.

"The young devil," murmured Snowey in Butterfly's ear. "Those violet blinkers of his will get him shot yet."

"He's doin' th' shootin' at present, an'—an' th' victim seems ter be enjoyin' it amazin'."

The harpist being an artist, touched the strings at the right moment, and Ginger sang on, but this time his eyes were on the eyes of Diamond Jake. Perhaps it was the way the lad manipulated his long, curving eyelashes, possibly it was some histrionic talent latent in him, but as he sang, the song seemed to become a mockery and a jibe at Jake, a swarthy, athletic fellow of thirty or so, who had "flash digger" written all over him.

He had come by his nickname on a former goldfield, where, having been unprecedently lucky, he had the gaps between his teeth filled with diamonds, and had cultivated a smile in order to display his adornments. A man of his hands, and aggressively quarrelsome in liquor or out of it, he was not a popular personage on any of the camps, and there were many in the bar who were far from sorry to see the Irish boy put him on a back bench, for all knew Jake to be inordinately vain of his powers as a singer and a charmer of women.

When the song ceased, Ginger came in for an ovation, and there were loud cries of "Encore! Encore!!"

"Oi'm dhry," answered the lad crisply, "wan song f'r wan man is my motto; let some other gents oblige."

He looked pointedly at Diamond Jake as he spoke. The digger Jim, who apparently had no other name, took his cue from Ginger's pointed glance, and said—

"Boys, perhaps Diamond Jake will foller suit and oblige." But Jake scowled and shook his head. "'Fraid ter harmonise after th' young 'un, Jake?" Then, as if commiserating with a fallen idol, Jim added: "Don't blame you for not vocalising after *that* bird o' song, Jake, an' we don't use violence ter induce you to. Th' kid's great; he's made o' honey an' molasses; he'll sure spoil th' sale of sugar in this camp if he sings often; th' flies won't be follerin' *you* after ter-night, Jake."

Jim sent a meaning glance at the girl behind the bar as he sent this shaft home. It almost looked as if Jim was not averse to a quarrel with Jake, but possibly for some reason known to himself, that notable personage, as Butterfly remarked, "was not hitchin' his battle banner to any of Jim's outfit." He turned to the girl instead, and called for drinks for the bar, a proceeding he presumably was not addicted to, though his claim was one of the richest on the field, for a digger remarked—

"Gee, but that red-headed youngster's melody must be powerful meltin', Jake's goin' ter anoint th' bar."

Ginger, either of set purpose or by what Snowey termed coincidental accident, found himself close to Jake. The truth was that Ginger, in his volcanic fashion, had taken an intense dislike to the man with the jewelled teeth as soon as he set eyes on him, and he

was more than willing to measure himself with the man. The aversion was mutual, Jake seeing the lad at his elbow, said with an oath—

"You've got a pretty voice." Then, indicating Ginger's not too handsome face, he added: "What beats *me* is how anything that sounds sweet could come out of a place so damn ugly."

"Man," roared McGlusky, "y're rotten wi' envy, y're just blushin' wi' jealousy like a crimson geranium bed in love wi' th' sun."

Ginger pushed the big man back.

"Och, let me alone, sorr, Oi'm not a babe on th' bottle."

He turned towards Diamond Jake, and balanced himself on his toes to strike, and Jake was waiting and watching—so was the Sergeant. The English ex-soldier stepped adroitly in between the pair, and in doing so managed to knock Diamond Jake's elbow so that his whisky went into his face.

Digger Jim put a huge hand on Ginger's belt and yanked him back out of the way.

"Those two chaps are well matched as to height an' weight, let 'em get busy."

There was little need for Digger Jim's exordium; the pair had got busy.

In the crowded bar the English soldier had all the worst of the debate; he was a fighter who wanted room to move about in to do his best. Diamond Jake, who was something of a tiger, was in his element in a rough and tumble at close quarters. The onlookers gave fair play, but they could not help getting in the way of the combatants in the crowded space. Snowey, watchful,

cool, observant of all things, saw how it was with the Sergeant. The Englishman, rushed off his feet, was hurled heavily to the floor, and lay half-stunned, whilst Diamond Jake exulted over him.

"Quick, take his feet, I'll take his head," snarled Snowey in Butterfly's ear. Then to the crowd: "Fair play f'r th' stranger, boys. We'll carry him into th' open air."

Swiftly the crowd made way, for fair play is the very essence of life in the Anzac lands. The Sergeant was carried out, protesting he wasn't half-beaten yet.

"Who said you was?" whispered Snowey in his ear. "All you want is room to handle y'r feet, pal, an' we're gettin' it f'r you."

"Make a ring, an' let's have this settled fair an' square."

It was a long, lithe New Zealander who shouted this demand, and he jerked his shirt over his head to show that he for one was ready to back his words.

A dusky Maori, his white teeth showing in a gladsome grin, took a hitch at his belt, as he ranged up alongside the Pakeha from his own country.

"Fair play all round, an' th' best man on top at the finish."

The Maori's big eyes were blazing as he voiced the religion of his people, and Digger Jim put the creed of Australia into his words, saying—

"Fair play; there's oceans of it between the Gulf of Carpentaria an' th' Southern Sea, an' there ain't nothin' else can live in this atmosphere, it'll demise sudden an' have no funeral pyre if it shows itself, eh, boys?"

A great rolling laugh, full of strange menace rose

from the throng; men poured out from tents and stores and dance-rooms, and a living ring was made in Republican Highway.

Just before the men rose from their corners, McGlusky kilted, naked as to the under leg, his jacket off, his big gnarled arms bare, strode into the ring.

"Ma buckies, A ken weel na Breetisher, na son o' Anzac wull meddle wi' this meetin' o' man wi' man; eef any foreigner does sae"—he paused, and looked menacingly round the ring—"A'll no' hit him, A'll pull him oot like a human telescope an' push him thegither again. My name's McGlusky." A roar, that told the veteran how deeply his name and fame had bitten into Anzac hearts was his answer, as he fell back and stood by the side of his mates behind the English Sergeant. "Air ye ready ower there, ye wi' th' diamond dentistry?"

Jake sprang from the knee of his second, to show that he was both ready and willing.

As the Sergeant rose from Snowey's knee, the Sharpshooter said in his easy, confident way—

"Make use of your head an' feet this round, matey, an' make him eat th' wind—lots of time between now an' to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII

A BLACK OUTLOOK FOR MAIDA

The full moon made Republican Highway almost as light as noonday, when the Sergeant stood up to face the redoubtable Diamond Jake. The "Jewelled Gent," as Butterfly termed him, was brimful of confidence; he came across the ring with the velocity of a tiger. The Englishman, following the advice of his wise and skilful second, stepped neatly and nimbly on one side. The Anzac crowd, quick to appreciate skill and coolness, broke into applause. Jake turned swiftly, and getting close, swung a sledge-hammer blow at his opponent's jaw. Down dropped the Englishman's curly head, and the blow passed harmlessly. Jake tried a heavy left hook, and his foe stepped back a pace, and nothing was disturbed but the atmosphere.

"Smile at him, Jake," chanted a voice from the crowd, "smile and dazzle him with your Kimberley outfit; you can't hit him with a shot-gun."

The taunt roused Jake's undisciplined temper. He bored in close, and began smashing at the Englishman's ribs with both hands; he did some damage, but took a lot out of himself.

"Steady, matey, steady."

Snowey's cold, unemotional voice cut its way through the noise of the crowd. The Sergeant heard and under-

stood the warning; he knew he had to save himself, and let his cast-iron adversary do the forcing. He contented himself with an occasional straight left-hand drive, but for the most part, he simply parried blows or side-stepped; some found a resting-place on his face or body.

"Bah, dat Englishman no mak' ze fight, he mak' ze footrace, by Gosh," shouted a Dutchman.

"Sew your mouth up, squarehead: you're too stupid to fight, an' too fat to run," jeered a New Zealander.

A novice watching the combatants in the ring, would have given very little for the Britisher's chance of victory; he appeared to be driven all over the place, but there were plenty in that crowd who saw through his tactics.

"He's fightin' to orders," said one man to a neighbour. "That wise guy in the Britisher's corner knows the game—there's rocks ahead f'r Diamond Jake; you wait till the man from Blighty gets the word an' cuts loose."

"If," remarked the man addressed, in plaintive tones, "if the Britisher shifts them sparklers in Jake's mouth, it's me for a bit o' dry-blowin' right here in th' pearly dawn—I promised my girl a diamond ring, I did."

The combatants clinched; there was a quick wrestle, and Jake cleverly back-heeled the Sergeant and threw him. That ended the round.

Quick as a flash Butterfly and McGlusky picked their man up and carried him to the corner where Snowey was waiting with his knee for a chair, and Ginger with his shirt off, ready to use as a "fan" in lieu of a towel.

No one spoke in that corner, except Snowey—

"You're doing fine, matey: just keep on holdin' th' line, an' let Jake keep comin' over th' top. I'll give you th' word when he tires, then at him like a hell cat."

The Sergeant nodded, and just a shadow of a smile parted his lips.

Jake's seconds had scented danger and warned their man, but he was of those who love their own way.

"Ease up, an' let him do some o' th' fightin', Jake."

"Ease up nuthin'. He's beat already," snarled Jake, and he went out to finish matters there and then.

The Sergeant avoided the savage onslaught, and Ginger laughed mockingly, which had the effect the Irish imp intended it should. In went Jake, his arms going like sledge-hammers, and when he landed, the Englishman reeled from the impact of those labour-hardened fists, and when he reeled Diamond Jake hammered him unmercifully.

"Oi'm thinkin' our man's bate, sorr."

"Th' stuff ye dae y'r thinkin' wi' wants puttin' in curl-papers, buckie. Hold y'r whisht, an' let Snowey dae th' thinkin', he's a field-marshal wastit."

"Bedad, if he lets his army get licked up hill and down dale like this, sorr, Oi'm blinkin' glad Oi ain't wan of his Tommies."

A good many others in the crowd began to share Ginger's views, for Jake was getting in a lot of punishing work.

"Holdin' your man back a bit too long, ain't you, mate?" grumbled a spectator who had gambled on the Britisher.

"How much have you got on th' Sergeant," demanded the Sharpshooter.

"Five ounces o' the best dust."

"I'll take the bet off your hands, if you want to hedge."

"It ain't that," growled the digger, "damn the bet—but I'd like to see Jake get a trimmin'; he's been a lot too fresh o' late."

"He's goin' ter get it—an' soon."

Two rounds later that desired event had not happened, and a quaint Cockney voiced his woe to the Sharpshooter.

"'Soon' seems an 'ell of a long way off, Mister; do you measure time by 'orseback or—or hairship?"

Snowey did not reply; he was leaning far forward, watching Diamond Jake, who had just made a desperate effort to end the fray, and was reeling from his exertion. All at once the Sharpshooter's figure stiffened; his voice, usually so lazily indifferent, came ripping from his throat in an exultant yell.

"Now, Sergeant—now—*over the top!*"

It was soldier calling to soldier in the savage tones each man had learnt to know and to understand in the mad exaltation of war. The thrill and intensity of the Sharpshooter's tones woke the badly-battered Briton like a bugle-blast: all that was dormant in him, all that Snowey had so wisely husbanded for one supreme effort, leapt to the surface in response to the call that heralded the long-waited-for moment. He rushed to the attack like a wolf at a winded stag. Straight from the shoulder his blows fell on Diamond Jake's adamantine face.

"At him, buckie, twa in th' face an' yin in th' wame."

The Sergeant could not have heard the veteran's advice in the uproar, but he did just that—"twa in th' face an' yin in th' wame," nor did he pause when that was accomplished, for as Diamond Jake bent forward, half doubled up by the fierce body-blow, up came the Britisher's fists, fair from the hips—first the right, then the left—and Jake went flying backwards as if he had been kicked—not hit. He almost fell, but whatever his faults, he was game. Dazed and beaten, he faced the onslaught like a man, and he got paid in full measure for all he had served out in the preceding rounds. The two deadly uppercuts had taken nearly all his bull-like strength from him, falling as they did when he had drawn too heavily on the bank of his vitality; yet he would not acknowledge defeat. Battered, broken, reeling, staggering, he was lashed from ring-side to ring-side, yet ever he raised his grisly face unflinchingly, his courage, his one redeeming quality, standing true to him to the last. And when he fell, he had made more friends than he had ever owned before.

The Sergeant bent over him to try and lift him to his corner, but the moment the Britisher relaxed his muscles, all the strength went out of him, and he dropped helpless as a babe on his knees beside the man he had beaten; and it was McGlusky and Snowey who carried Jake into the hotel, whilst Ginger and Butterfly performed the same office for the badly-used-up Briton.

A wee while later, as McGlusky stood combing his beard with his fingers in the bar, there came to him that large, heavy Dutchman who had jeered at the Sergeant during the battle. Now he was all smiles and

effusiveness. He held out a hand like a ham. Mac looked at it as he might have looked at something he had seen in a dream and wanted to forget.

"Be gosh, ve von der fight, Mynheer, eh?"

He pushed his hand still more invitingly in the veteran's direction. McGlusky slowly took his pipe from his mouth, and, using the Dutchman's hand as a tray, deliberately knocked the hot ashes of his tobacco into the extended palm, causing the instant withdrawal of the offer of amity. Then Mac pushed his whiskered face unpleasantly close to the clean-shaven visage of the Hollander.

"A wad na say a theeng ta hurt th' feelin's o' a babe, ye twa-faced son o' a waterspout. Y're on oor side th' noo because we won, but A ken fine which side ye were on durin' th' fechtin'. Y're o' them tha' wad hunt wi' a Kaiser an' run wi' a King." He spun the heavy man right round. "A'm meanin' no disrespec', but y're no' welcome."

He shot out his foot, the heavy man plunged forward, and went head first through the harp of the Italian, who had resumed his playing. The Italian rose in a fury, and seizing McGlusky by the whiskers, began to pluck him as if he thought he had hold of the German Eagle. Mac got himself free as best he could, but did not lift a hand to the Italian.

"A'm no' gawn ta fecht ye," he said ruefully, "f'r A'm feared when A kicked yon cheese-faced 'man-o'-both-sides' through y'r harp A didna raise a melody, but discord. Dinna greet ower y'r harp, signor, A'll mak' ye a set o' Scottish pipes, an' gin ye can play 'em, ye'll bring mair tears ta th' eyes o' folk wi' yin skirl

than ye wad wi' yon tum-tummin' dom thing o' many strings in a year o' blue moons."

On their way back to camp, Butterfly remarked—

"We've shore had an amazin' good time ter-night—specially th' Sergeant."

"Na sae bad—nae sae bad; we'll gang again coom Saturday nicht, an' maybe A'll get a chance ta say a few ceevil theengs ta Mister Rooney."

"Oi'm thinkin' he's fightin' shy o' yez, sorr."

"A wad no' say tha', wee mannie, it's no' fair ta tak' away a man's character, though A'm o' th' opeenion A ha' seen better things than him sittin' on top' o' an organ-grinder's musical equipage beggin' f'r pennies."

For two days the Sergeant was too stiff and sore to do any work on his claim, but on the morning of the third day he started to shovel earth out of the hole he had been digging in before he went to Canvas Town. He tossed the loose earth which he had previously broken down and left unshovelled into his dry-blower, and then set the machine in motion. Suddenly he uttered a yell that brought all of his mates running from their claims to his side.

"Wha' is it, buckie?"

"Gold!" gasped the Sergeant. "Gold—look at it!"

They looked, and saw a pretty collection of small nuggets in the upper and coarser sieve, and a nice rim of fine gold in the "ripples" on the lower and very fine sieve.

McGlusky put a big kindly hand on the ex-soldier's shoulder, and said with a smile—

"Gude f'r ye, ma buckie; y'r luck ha' foond ye; may it stay wi' ye a' y'r days, but dinna screech tha' way;

it's dom fine, but it's no' th' treasure-house o' King Solomon ye've foond. If th' 'boys' on th' ither claims hear ye yell, they'll be comin' doon expectin' ta see a hunner-ounce nugget, an' they'll laugh."

The Sergeant calmed under his tone, for he knew how phlegmatically most of the Anzac diggers accepted both good and bad fortune.

"It's my first decent strike, Mac, and—and, by Jove, it *is* lovely."

"A ken, A ken; A yelped like a puppy wi' a burnt paw masel' when A mad' ma first strike o' th' pure metal. It's gran' stuff, an' it's *clean*, won frae th' soil wi'oot cheatin' or lyin' or any un'erhan' work."

Ginger eyed the new find as if he'd like to eat it, but he said—

"Och, cut that out, sorr; ut's th' root av all evil, no matter where you get it." Then, fingering the largest nugget in an absent-minded fashion, he remarked: "Bedad, Sergeant darlin', shall Oi wear this on me watch-chain as a cha-r-m, to remember yez by?"

Snowey had drifted in an apparently aimless sort of way to the side of the hole where the Sergeant had found the gold. As he looked around him, his keen eyes noticed the clean-cut imprint of a woman's boot in the soft earth. Slowly he turned his eyes in the direction of Maida Lamarde's tent, and saw the girl watching him. Their eyes met, then very slowly and deliberately Snowey obliterated the track of the woman's boot in the soil by passing his own boot over it. Then he went to the Sergeant and, extending his hand, said—

"Pard, y'r luck's in—better'n you guess." And then

he nearly stunned the ex-soldier by adding: "An' I blinkin' well don't know if I oughter congratulate you or not."

"What do *you* make of that, Butterfly?" queried the Sergeant, as the Sharpshooter lounged off to his claim.

"Dunno," replied the Yankee. "Tryin' ter understand Snowey is like tryin' ter work out a cypher message written by a shell-shock patient sufferin' from D.T.'s an' a big bite from a love microbe, but whatever he means, he means with all his heart—bank on that, pardner."

The Sergeant stood looking thoughtfully at his gold; then, speaking to himself, he murmured—

"Understanding Snowey *is* a bit of a puzzle, an' Butterfly's explanation don't seem to make it much easier."

On the following Saturday evening, the Tiger Claim crowd went into Canvas Town, and McGlusky took with him a new set of home-made "pipes." It was his fond belief that of all music between heaven and earth, the bagpipes was the most enjoyable. As soon as the party arrived at The Three Sparrows Hostel, Mac volunteered to give the crowd a musical treat. His offer was received with acclamation. Tucking the bag under one arm, and thrusting the chanter in his mouth, the big fellow proceeded to fill the world with a most awesome din. Once when he finished a selection and looked round for applause, Ginger demanded information.

"Be me soul, sorr, what was that hullabaloo ye just threw on th' atmosphere? Was ut an imitation av a mob av perishin' cattle callin' f'r rain?"

"A thocht ye had an ear f'r music, mannie; it was *The Flowers of the Forest.*"

"Is there any more av ut, sorr?"

McGlusky beamed all over his face.

"Wad ye like it ower again, buckie? If so, here goes."

He sprang up, and began pacing up and down the bar, his pipes shrieking and wailing wofully. Scotchmen all over the camp heard the din, and straightway forsook business and pleasure, and crowded to The Three Sparrows, for the pipes will draw a Scot from the edge of the grave. They came in joyous groups, eyes aglow and heads up, and they crowded every one else out of the bar, except the piper's immediate friends.

The pioneer played and kept on playing until the sweat rolled down his face, which had grown red as any peony with his exertions. Some one tossed a couple of sticks on the middle of the floor and crossed them in imitation of broadswords. A man sprang forward and began to dance, and he danced well, placing his feet nicely in the spaces between the imitation swords, whirling, leaping, clapping his hands together and snapping his fingers over his head. Faster and faster Mac played, and faster flew the feet of the dancer. At last, with a flourish like the screech of a doomed soul heading for the pit, Mac brought the dance to a close, and then the liquor began to fly. Toasts were drunk to "Auld Reekie," and the bonny lassies over the water were not forgotten, nor any other toast that would justify a drink. Like boys who had broken bounds, the Scotchmen gave themselves up to pleasure,

and the happiest of them all was the grim, gaunt man with the pipes.

"Feelin' good, Old Timer?"

"A'm on th' varry threshold o' th' kingdom o' happiness, Snowey."

Forgotten were the years of danger and toil; broad jest and rough-edged badinage flew from mouth to mouth.

"Any little thing I can do, Mac, to help pile th' bliss up? You can shore count me in."

"A never kenned th' day or nicht ye failed ma, Snowey. A'd be as happy as a Turk who'd had a bran' new wife sent ta him by post on his birthday, eef A had yin theeng th' noo."

"If it's in this camp, you name it, old mate, an' if we don't get it, it's because an earthquake wouldn't shift it, Butterfly?"

"Shore thing," cooed the Yank. "If it's anything a couple of men can lift, loot or buy, dry or wet, you christen it now, McGlusky, an' leave th' developin' process ter me an' Snowey."

"Eef A had a haggis, boys, th' full moon wad be shinin' doon on Jamie de McGlusky."

"Haggis?" The Sharpshooter looked at the Yank perplexedly. "Is it a new kind o' bagpipe, or—or something to eat, Butterfly?"

"Search *me;* I never hunted any animal o' that name."

"Och, yez don't know everything in Columbus country, then," jeered Ginger. "Oi'll make yez wan, sorr; if Oi can't get th' inside linin' av a sheep f'r th' dish, sorr, Oi'll borrer a horse, but yez shall have y'r haggis for supper—Oi'll cook ut."

"Ye will *not*, ye blastie. Dae ye think A've forgot th' yin ye mad' f'r me in Egypt? A can taste it yet."

Ginger's grin was like the birth of a new day.

"Och, that wan? Oi had ter use what Oi cud get f'r y'r auld haggis; ut wasn't horse, sorr, that time, ut was camel—wan that had bruk down under a transport load an' had ter be shot ter save ut's life; ut was yerself said ut was a pity ter waste ut, sorr."

"A didn't theenk A was goin' ta eat it, ye wee blastie."

Mac spat viciously on the floor, as he recalled the memory.

Some one shouted for more music just then, and at the same time Butterfly caught Annie Laurie making a sign to Ginger which the red-headed image did not see. The good-natured young giant pushed his way to the bar and seizing a favourable opportunity, spoke to the young woman.

"Anything I can do, Miss, ter help a lady in distress?"

She smiled.

"You're Ginger's mate, aren't you?"

"One of 'em, Miss."

"Tell him I have a couple of hours off, and I'm going to the dance-hall."

Butterfly took the message, and Snowey supplemented it by saying—

"Suppose the four of us do a drift in that direction? The Old Timer's anchored here for a spell."

The rest fell in with this idea, and the Sharpshooter passed the news on to the veteran.

"We're goin' ter sample th' dance-hall, Mac."

"Dae ye want ma?"

"Want you all right, but not bad enough ter fight all these Scotties f'r you, an' we'd have to if we looted their piper."

"Aye, they've a gran' ear f'r music, th' Scotch."

The dance-hall had been made gay with flags of all nations; at one end was the inevitable bar; the other end was decorated, as Butterfly phrased it, with the orchestra—three fiddles and a flute. A stage had been extemporised for this department of the entertainment, by laying a few rough planks on top of some upturned beer barrels.

After a cursory glance round, Snowey voiced his opinion concerning the floor—

"It's not as good f'r dancin' on as some we saw in Italy, but it's more enterprisin'—it's full o' hills and hollows. Th' man who laid this floor must ha' been a mountaineer an' was dreamin' of home while he worked."

A happy, care-free crowd surged up and down the hall to the strains of the fiddles and the flute. The musicians did not keep very good time, each went blissfully on his own appointed way.

"That's a democratic orchestra," gurgled Butterfly, "th' fiddles take th' dancers up th' hills, an' th' flute escorts 'em down."

"Bedad, yez can't complain about that, ye grousin' Yank; y're gettin' variety, if y're gettin' nothin' else, wid three instruments playin' th' same piece, each to a different time, yez can't fail ter be in step once in a while, can yez?"

Most of the couples were males, but there was a fair sprinkling of the softer sex.

Snowey was watching a door over which hung the flag of Australia.

"What's th' magnet in that direction, pardner? You've been watchin' that door as if it was a free drinks Elysium."

"Dunno—yet, Yank, perhaps it's a lost luggage asylum, but I have an idea germinating under my hat that's where th' ladies enter, an' I'm goin' ter make a bee line f'r it as soon as I hear th' shudder of a skirt."

The door opened, the flag of Australia was pushed aside, and a girl stood in the opening. The Sharpshooter made a swift forward move, then checked as suddenly as he had started, for Maida Lamarde was facing him.

"Up to you, Sergeant."

"No, you go ahead, Snowey; my face won't bear inspection yet at close quarters, thanks to Diamond Jake."

Snowey crossed the hall in the girl's direction, and at the same moment a hand fell on Ginger's shoulder. Facing round, he looked straight into the merry eyes of Annie Laurie. At times the Irish lad could be very rapid: without a word he slipped an arm around the girl's waist, and whirled her into the throng of laughing, stamping, jesting humanity. The girl was a good dancer, and Ginger had music in his feet, and the sheer joy of the dance was with them both, A tress of her wayward hair lifted in the whirl of the dance, fell against his cheek. She put up a hand to throw it back.

"Lave ut," he whispered, "lave ut where ut is, ut's got th' fragrance av somethin' dropped from hivin."

"Wrong, Ginger," she laughed, "it's brilliantine you can smell."

"Is ut, honny?" he murmured in her ear. "Faith, Oi didn't know th' angels used ut."

"Little devil," she retorted, "you've learnt in a swift school, and learnt young."

But the clasp of her hand in his grew warmer.

Meanwhile, two men were standing in front of Maida Lamarde; one was very tall with as fine a figure as a woman's eyes might wish to rest upon, and a face that made all others in the dance-hall seem plain to the verge of ugliness; the other was the Sharpshooter of the old Anzac brigade.

"I think I was first in the field, Miss Lamarde."

"Not by an inch," replied Snowey, "but Miss Lamarde will choose."

"I think this gentleman came a moment before you did—you paused, you know, after you started."

"First or last makes no difference, Miss, since you have made your choice. I guess I'll go and help fill in th' scenery till another lady arrives."

With a slight inclination of his head, Snowey drew back and let Maida pass with the other man.

"Beat by an eyelash that time, son."

"No, Butterfly, I was beat by a face, an' a damn good-lookin' face too—did you see it?"

"Couldn't from here, too many gyratin' samples o' both sexes in between. Anythin' interestin' about th' face that beat you, son, except th' looks?"

"Not a heap, only that it bears th' name o' Rooney —f'r th' present."

"There shore will be somethin' doin' if McGlusky

comes here ter browse on th' beauty of Canvas Town. I'm sorry, all th' same, Snowey, the girl gave you th' frozen mitt f'r th' sake of a hot air-bubble like Rooney."

"I didn't like bein' put in a corner an' labelled 'Not Wanted,' an' that's a fact. I haven't got any yearnin's f'r Mister Rooney."

"Cut him out for the next dance, Snowey," interpolated the Sergeant.

"Don't think I'd have a dog's chance; he's as good-lookin' as th' devil, an' girls mostly follow their eyes." Then the Sharpshooter looked very hard at the Sergeant, and said: "Your beauty sure has been bumped considerable by Diamond Jake: all th' same, if I was bettin' on the event, I'd back you, Sergeant, to beat Rooney for th' caressin' stakes with Maida Lamarde."

The Englishman laughed.

"Let go of my leg, Snowey."

"I mean what I say: I'd gamble on your chance. Are you fond o' th' girl?"

"Bet she never gives me a thought," replied the Englishman.

Butterfly chipped into the conversation.

"If you opine Snowey has hold of your laig, Sergeant, you're treein' th' wrong 'possum. If there was any bettin' on th' event, I'd shore stack my dust on the card Snowey has just throwed down."

"What are you fellows gettin' at?"

A flush of colour was showing through the tan on the Britisher's face, in spite of Diamond Jake's handiwork.

"Gettin' at nothin'," was the Yankee's reply, "but,

son, if Maida Lamarde ain't made o' mud, she must have sized you up f'r a man long ago."

"Why?"

"Well," drawled the American, "it ain't my play ter draw th' curtains from domestic affairs as a general rule, but since you're askin' f'r reasons, an' you're our pard, an' ace high at that, I'll tell you why. Who is it goes o' nights with his little axe an' knocks down scrub timber, an' splits it f'r camp firewood by th' light o' th' moon, an' then walks on tiptoe an' stacks it near th' girl's tent?"

The Englishman's face was very red now. "I don't know," he growled.

"Askin' y'r pardon, son, but you're a liar." This shot came from Snowey, who added: "Who lugged the girl's food supplies all the way out from Canvas Town on his back when the storekeeper was sick, an' lied like Ananias to th' girl, sayin' a camel-man had brought th' goods while she was away lookin' f'r her mare, eh?"

"Pity you chaps can't find something better to do with your time than to watch me," growled the Sergeant.

"Bless your pretty life," answered the Sharpshooter, "we didn't watch *you*, Englishman, but we watch Maida Lamarde's tent to see no harm comes to her, because we once accepted hospitality at her house, an' when an Australian breaks bread under a roof, everything there is sacred to him—or he's a dog."

"That's so, I've found that out," commented the Yank. "If you want ter tie any Anzac up tighter than you cud tie him with a lawsuit, invite him to take a meal, an' when he's sat below y'r salt, he's yours. It's

th' best blinkin' quality the Anzacs have—their belief in th' sacredness of hospitality; they knock th' Arabs cold at it. I lived in Australia an' New Zealand before th' war, an' I know."

"What's this got to do with Maida Lamarde?"

"Just this, Sergeant"—it was Snowey taking up the parable now—"just this, son; while we watched Maida's tent, we saw *you*, an' saw what you were doing for her, an' if that girl ain't wise to your kindness, she's a heap slower than I take her to be, an' if she didn't like you, she'd have stopped you, you can bet your Sunday shirt on that: no Anzac lass takes a favour from a man she has no use for—if she does, she ain't a woman, she's somethin' you dig out of a mine."

"Perhaps she has a sort of liking for me, boys, looks on me as a brother, perhaps."

"Br-o-th-er." The inflexion in the Sharpshooter's voice was indescribable. "You go an' sing that cradle song ter th' kids, Sergeant; I didn't expect that kind of dope from you, it's th' sort of soft goods I'd expect that devil Ginger ter bring me on a plate when I ask him about Annie Laurie. Now you go an' cut Rooney out; he's had three dances with Maida, an' he's sittin' as close to her now as a hatchin' hen to its eggs. Go on. Here comes Ginger."

The Sergeant crossed the hall, and Maida with a movement of her hand made room for him to sit beside her, a fact which did not seem to add to the joy of Mr. Rooney, who was on her other side.

Butterfly looked at the three for a moment, then—

"A pearl between two shells," he remarked.

"H'm," murmured the Sharpshooter, as he followed

the Yankee's gaze, "H'm—one shell looks as if it had seen rough weather, but we know it's good stuff, eh, Yank? As f'r th' other, it's got all the polish, but——"

Snowey kicked one heel against the instep of his other foot, a habit of his when words seemed superfluous.

Ginger came up, perspiring but happy.

"Why ain't yez dancin'?"

Butterfly grinned.

"We've hired ourselves out f'r th' night as ornaments ter th' scenery f'r this outfit; besides, son, it ain't every quadruped that has hay runnin' after it."

"Be th' soul av me, Butterfly, if yez call Annie Laurie a—a bundle av hay——"

"I shore didn't say a bundle, Ginger."

By Mary, she's a drame. Oi never danced wid a girl like her; th' French girls are light an' aisy, th' Italians are as nate on their fate as birds on a bough, but y'r Anzac girls—och, Snowey darlint, they could dance on cobwebs an' divil a thread av ut would they break. Oi never danced wid a drame before, but Oi've done ut now, Oi——"

The Irish lad looked into the Sharpshooter's face, and the expression he saw there halted his rhapsody. Snowey's lips had curved ever so slightly, his heavily lidded eyes had almost closed; his clean-shaven, lean, bronzed face looked the epitome of silent, sarcastic mirth.

"Spake, ye divil, spake; don't luk at me like a Chinese god bustin' wid a bad joke."

Then the Sharpshooter spoke.

"Kid, you make me tired. I've heard you usin' them

same terms of extravagance concernin' female varieties in every blessed country we've been in. You're Irish, an' you can't help it. Th' Irish can do most things better'n most men, but two things they never oughter come within gunshot of."

"An' what's th' name av thim two things?" demanded Ginger hotly.

"Politics an' petticoats, son. One drives them plumb crazy, and they drive every one else loco with the other."

"Och, cut out thim matters av high policy, an' gyrate round this hall once wid Annie Laurie."

"Tired of her yourself, kid, or has she given you a browsin' order?"

"She did an' she didn't. Ut's this way: Oi danced three times runnin' wid her, an' th' 'boys' got mad about ut, an' said Oi'd be adjacent to a fight if Oi danced wan more, until some one else had a turn. Oi tuk me belt up a hole ter get ready f'r th' trouble, an' she said: 'Honey, if you fight over me, Oi'm goin' home ter Th' Three Sparrows an' me little bed, an' Oi'll never dance wid you again.' So I left 'em to ut—f'r a bit."

The orchestra began again, and the flute hit the high notes, and Butterfly exclaimed—

"Bully f'r th' Sergeant, he's got his arms full o' heaven."

"Manin' Maida Lamarde?" sneered Ginger. "By th' whiskers Oi'm goin' ter have when I grow up, th' Sergeant's welcome to that same hivin; she's th' picture av bad luck, an' she'll bring a peck av trouble ter th' Englishman yet. Do yez mind th' red colour

av her hand th' day we came ter th' Tiger Claim? An' do yez mind it was th' Sergeant she shuk hands wid that day?"

"Fade out; you're as superstitious as an East African nigger. Go an' buy a gollywog to change your luck. Fact is, kid, you're not fit ter be a citizen of this enlightened country, unless we petrify you an' stand you at a street corner for a postal pillar-box."

Butterfly smiled audibly as he listened to the Sharpshooter's tirade.

"Thanks for illuminatin' my ignorance, pard," he murmured. "I was always some puzzled to know what Ginger's capacious mouth was built for; your pillar-box idea dispels my darkness. Don't petrify him when he's smilin' at Annie Laurie, or he'll only do f'r th' newspaper an' magazine post."

An oath broke from the much-commented-upon mouth of Ginger, but it was not called forth by his comrades' broad banter. Mr. Rooney was gliding by to the strains of a waltz, and his arm encircled the waist of the lassie from The Three Sparrows.

"He can dance, an' he gets th' pick o' th' bunch every time." That was Snowey's verdict as he watched Rooney. A moment later he announced his future movements: "Boys, when this dance ends, I'm goin' ter butt in; I'm beginnin' ter look on Mr. Rooney as a public nuisance, an'—I don't want no help, savee?"

The glance he shot at his comrades was of the order that Ginger described as "Wan av Snowey's stand-off-th'-grass-an'-be-damned-to-you" variety.

The waltz was about half-way through its agony at the hands of the orchestra, when the Sergeant came

abreast of the three comrades with Maida Lamarde in his arms. Snowey made a sudden swift signal, and the Englishman stopped dead.

"What's the matter?" was Maida's sharp query.

"Don't know, but Snowey signalled."

"Do you always obey him?"

"It's not a question of obeying; he's my pal, an' if you knew him, you'd know that means a heap."

The Sharpshooter stepped up to them.

"Miss Lamarde, will you finish this waltz with me? I've a reason for asking, and I'll explain to the Sergeant later."

"Sure thing, Snowey."

The Englishman handed the girl to the ex-Anzac, and she, with a puzzled expression, looked into her new partner's eyes.

"You're not the sort to do this for nothing."

"No, I'm not that sort, Miss Maida."

The next moment she was being whirled away by an arm as flexible as steel, yet strangely gentle in spite of its strength. Ginger rather fancied he could dance, so did the Sergeant, and Butterfly Brown, as he worded it, had an idea he could "gyrate some," but Maida Lamarde soon knew that she was in the hands of a man who had all the mystery and passion of the poetry of motion at his command. As Maida afterwards expressed it: "He did not dance, he melted into the music, and took his partner with him."

Only once did he pause, and that was for the purpose of addressing a low-spoken order to the orchestra.

"Keep this dance goin', boys, till every one drops out but me an' my partner, an' I'll drown you in whisky

and bring you back to life with a couple of ounces of gold-dust between you."

The flute and the fiddles nodded ready acquiescence ; they were used to strange requests from their patrons, and it took a good deal to surprise them. Once when the "flute" had asked big Oscar the Dane for a light for a cigarette between dances, Oscar had twisted a bank-note into a spiral and obliged him, yet when the Dane had first arrived in Australia, he had worked as a wharf labourer, and worked hard, and judging from the pace he was going, and the brains at his disposal, would probably end his sojourn in the country in some similarly exalted position in life.

As the dance proceeded, one by one the wearied couples began to drop out, and straightway breasted the bar for liquid refreshment, and champagne corks "popped" as they flew, until it was like being in the midst of a miniature barrage. The first contingent of couples to surrender the floor were "bucks," as two male dancers were styled. This left plenty of room for the lucky few who had daughters of Eve to dance with, and they gladly made the most of their opportunities. Nearly all the softer sex were fine dancers, for that is an art in which the daughters of Anzac excel, but the best on the floor that night were Annie Laurie and Maida Lamarde. As for Mr. Rooney, whatever country bred him, he was a dancer, and there was that in his movements that would have told any travelled man of the world that he had at some period of his career lived and danced in Vienna ; all that perfect training and teaching could do had been done for him. Snowey had not the nameless "something" which speaks for

years of tuition, but he had native grace, and now that he was letting himself go, a fund of *diableric* that few who knew him would have suspected. Of set purpose he had started out to match himself with Rooney, and soon the other man had sensed the rivalry, and at first seemed amused, but as the minutes sped by, he realised that this slender, fair-haired, boyish-looking man was a rival he could not afford to hold too lightly.

At last only three or four couples were in possession of the floor, and the rest of the men and women were watching eagerly, the only non-observant folk being the bar-tenders who kept the liquor flowing merrily. All eyes were on Rooney and Snowey and their partners. Annie Laurie was known to all, and a general favourite; only a few knew Maida Lamarde, but they soon spread the news that she was the girl who owned and worked the rich claim in the small valley.

"Who's the guy with her?" asked Brannigan, the man who ran the best-patronised gambling-hell on the field, of Duncan Rose the wrestler.

"Oh, one of the Tiger Claim crowd; he seconded the Englishman against Diamond Jake the other night—he knows *that* game, you can take it from me."

"He knows this game too," replied Brannigan, "he can dance like the devil. I used to be good on a floor myself, but not his kind of good—he's away beyond par."

Snowey, whatever purpose he had in view, was certainly bent on challenging comparison between himself and Rooney. He worked his way past the other couples, and got close to Rooney and Annie Laurie. Once or twice he caught the eyes of Rooney's partner fixed on his face, and when their eyes met

Annie smiled her merry smile, to which he responded with a friendly little nod, and what Ginger termed "a half-partin' av th' lips like a tulip tryin' ter be dacent."

Once Snowey whispered to his partner: "Tired?"

She looked up like a girl wakened from a dream, for Snowey's dancing was hypnotic.

"No, I could go on for ever—with you."

Something in the tones of her voice, something too, perhaps, in the thrill of her clinging figure, made the Sharpshooter knit his brows, and the grimness that at times marred his looks crept into his face.

"Not tired?"—he was answering Maida now. "Then dance till you drop."

She knew then for a certainty there was something more than a mere dance afoot, but she only settled herself down more snugly in the hollow of his arm, and let herself drift on the tide of his magnetism.

Never did two girls dance with a greater difference than Maida Lamarde and Annie Laurie. The latter was all light and fire, all sparkle and gaiety; to every movement of Rooney she responded like magic, her eyes were sparkling, her white teeth showing between moist red lips. Maida moved and looked for the time being like a dream woman set to music.

Soon the crowd sensed something out of the common; they realised that a duel was in progress of which the dance was only an item.

"Where does this chap Rooney come from?"

A digger asked this of Brannigan the gambler, who was reputed to know all there was to know about anybody of note on the field.

"Search me."

"Stranger, eh?"

"Yes; but he's hot stuff."

"Well, that fair-haired conundrum dancin' with th' gold-claim girl don't look like any infant brought up on a spoon, to me."

"No; an' if there ain't a bottle o' th' best brewin' between them two sharps, write me down as a missionary."

As a missionary was about the last thing on earth any one who knew Brannigan would take him for, his judgment was accepted.

The Sergeant with his friends had been watching the strange dance, a queer look of pain growing in the Englishman's eyes as he noticed how Maida Lamarde clung to her partner. As for Ginger, even his unbridled vocabulary could not do justice to his feelings as he watched the unbounded delight expressed on Annie Laurie's face.

"Oi'm through wid th' hen persuasion, Oi am, after this, bad cess to 'em. When wan av 'em seems ter be runnin' after you, she's only runnin' away from some other man ter make him run after her. They're suckled on decate, an' if th' truth's in them, you want a mine-sweeper ter help yez locate ut."

Butterfly, being quite heart-free, could not help quizzing the impulsive lad.

"Meanin' Annie Laurie, kid?"

"Who else wud Oi be meanin'? Luk at th' splay-futted Jezebel, she axin' Rooney wid her eyes if he'll marry her by special licence, or—or jump a broom an' save th' marriage fees."

"Splay-footed, Ginger? You shore can't see straight;

she could dance on cobwebs an' never put her hoof through an' spoil th' pattern."

Ginger snarled as his former rhapsodies were flung in his teeth.

"Come to the bar and have a drink."

It was the voice of the Sergeant that made the soothing suggestion, and the three pushed their way through the crowd. As they did so, a friendly voice queried—

"Say, pal, what's the name of your chum who's dancing with the gold-claim girl?"

"We call him Snowey f'r short," responded the Sergeant.

"No relation to Snowey of the Anzacs, I guess, eh?"

"Same chap."

"Is that a straight wire or a leg pull?"

"Straight wire."

"Jumping Sarah, if that's so he's top-hole; we've all read about him."

"He *is* top-hole; if you've bred anything out this way better than him, I haven't met 'em."

"Looks a good 'un, an' say, if it's not divin' too deep inter th' inner sanctuary o' private ideas, what's his little game to-night? We can all see he's signallin' the good-lookin' guy they call Rooney not to mix his drinks too promiscuous f'r fear his feet stray where trouble grows."

"You think he's askin' f'r trouble with Rooney?"

"Well, mate, not exactly askin' f'r trouble, but sort o' signallin' th' handsome guy that trouble is a plant that grows in these parts, if he's in need of a little f'r immediate consumption."

"Well, I don't know any more than you do; Snowey don't often take any one into his confidence."

"Tell me, mate, can he fight? If he's really Anzac Snowey, we all got his measure with a gun or a bay'nit, but can he shift things with his hands?"

"Him? He's a lamb, Mary's little lamb was a harpooned alligator compared to him, for fierceness."

This contribution to the conversation came from Butterfly who was handing the drinks round.

The friendly, but too inquisitive, stranger looked into the American's none too handsome face, and seemed to study it for quite a while, then he unbosomed himself—

"Stranger, you're a Yank by your accent, an' you *may* be th' fountain head o' the eternal truth—you're about unhandsome enough for somethin' like that."

Butterfly, who could stand as much rough banter without losing his temper as any man between the North Pole and the nether regions, only chortled—

"Don't laig-rope yer remarks concernin' my facial adornments, old son, f'r fear o' ploughin' up my feelin's. I'm rather proud o' my looks; folks out home said I resembled Abe Lincoln—on th' outside o' my head."

"That so?" responded the Australian. "Then, by gosh, Mister Abe Lincoln must ha' been th' ugly ducklin' o' somebody's family."

"Did any sculptor ever ax yerself ter sit f'r him as a model?" rasped Ginger, whose temper was always just a wee bit touchy.

"Yes—one."

"Then, by Mary, he must ha' been modellin' front-door knockers f'r a p'leece-station or—or a poor-house."

The three comrades pushed away from the bar to the front row of the crowd that still watched the dancers with absorbing interest. Only two couples now swayed round and round the floor, and it was evident Rooney was tiring, his weight was telling against him, but Annie Laurie still danced superbly. Maida was not dancing with any effort of her own; for the time being she had yielded herself up body and soul to Snowey, and he, like the Wandering Jew, looked as if he could and would go on for ever.

"I'll lay odds to a hundred ounces on the light weight."

It was the voice of Brannigan the gambler that rose clear above all other sounds in the hall.

Rooney heard and scowled. Snowey also heard, but made no sign.

For a while Rooney, spurred by the tense atmosphere of the crowd, and the certainty that the man who was dancing against him meant to make him crawl down publicly, danced better than at any time during the evening, but Snowey capped each effort.

"I'll follow suit on Brannigan's lead," growled Shadow Millroy, the thinnest man, and one of the luckiest on the rush. "And," he added, "I'll stand wine all round if I lose on the light weight, not rain-juice an' whisky."

Suddenly at a particularly uneven patch in the floor Rooney blundered; had he been fresh he would have picked up the step easily, as it was, something of the man's real nature came to the surface: he blamed the girl he was dancing with, and swung her violently past the bad place. Annie Laurie was not the kind of girl

to submit tamely to a public affront: the hot colour flashed into her face.

"Don't lose your temper," she said sweetly, "because you're being out-danced by a better man," and the people along the side of the hall heard her words, as she intended they should, for Annie was vain of her dancing.

Snowey deliberately danced over the same bad patch in the floor, and took it as if he had been on a Roman ballroom floor.

"Nerve tells in any old game," cried a voice from near the bar, and again Rooney's brows came down, and as he whirled he shot a glance into the face of his rival, and Snowey's lip curled in an unmistakable sneer.

Rooney tried hard to pick up his lost advantage, but all harmony between him and his partner had been destroyed. He made another blunder, and then stopped.

"Bate—bate ter a frazzle!"

It was the jubilant voice of Ginger heralding his comrade's victory.

Snowey danced on easily, carelessly, and with superb grace until he came opposite the Sergeant; then he handed Maida to the Englishman with a quick—

"Thanks, pal, and thank you, Miss Maida—you're a wonder."

He caught Annie Laurie's eye, beckoned to her, and she came quickly.

"Too tired to show the boys it was your partner, not you, who quitted?"

For answer Annie placed her hand in his, and away

they went, round and round the room like a pair of swallows on the wing, until the flute and the fiddles gave up in disgust, and with a crash of discord brought the long, long waltz to an end. Then the devil-may-care voice of French Charley was heard—

"By Gar, dat was ze slap in ze face with ze gloves off for ze big fellah. I never see it done better—me."

And Rooney's upper teeth went into his lower lip, and his left hand slipped inside his shirt. Whereupon Ginger, who was watching, quietly but quickly stepped in front of Snowey.

"What did you do that for, kid?"

Snowey had not seen the hand go into the shirt.

"Do what?"

"Come off it, son, you know what I mean?"

"Av all th' cheek Oi've seen, you Anzacs beat th' band. You dance wid me girl, an' put drames av bein' Mrs. Snowey into her head, an' you want ter keep me from havin' a chance ter dispel thim same nightmares," lied Ginger glibly.

"Sounds like last week's washin' comin' home ter me, kid. Did Rooney do anything ter make you think I wanted a wet nurse?"

"Och, him! Forgit ut, he's an ondacent memory on th' map av me imagination. But, Snowey——"

"What is it?"

"If yez brought more than one gun from camp ter-night, lend ut ter me!"

"I didn't; you take Annie Laurie home: she's pinin' against th' wall f'r your comfortin' presence."

"Let her pine, an' be damned to her; she danced holes in her stockin's wid Rooney, let him mend 'em.

There's th' little black-eyed girl wid a waist no bigger than a rolled-up umbrella from Th' Kangaroo an' Emu: she give me a taste av th' glad eye just now. Oi'll go an' place myself adjacent to her, an' p'rhaps Oi'll take her home. Oi'm no shoe-string f'r Annie Laurie ter tie an' untie at her pleasure."

"Hell owns no fury like a vermilion-headed Irishman given th' order o' th' boot by inconstant beauty," chuckled Butterfly.

Ginger took himself off, and soon swaggered out of the hall with the girl from The Kangaroo and Emu on his arm, the swagger being mainly for the benefit of Annie Laurie, who, however, gave him a friendly nod and smile that displayed her teeth at their best, which caused Butterfly Brown to remark—

"Annie has shore got Ginger's measure better 'n any army tailor ever had."

CHAPTER IX

WHEN THE LOVE-BUG BITES

"A'm no' sayin' a word agin wimmin, ye ken tha', Butterfly; we men air made o' sic saft material, we wad go loco wi'oot 'em, though maist o' th' time they can get along fine wi'oot us, wha' wi' their weans an' their washin', maist o' them dinna care a dom eef they only see us fra Saturday till Monday, an' they dinna often pray f'r twa Sundays a week, but when the love-bug bites a lassie, she's no mair responsible f'r wha' she will or will no' dae, than a pole Angus coo in th' fly season."

Ginger had perforce to butt in: "Sorr——"

"Weel, ma mannie?"

"Is that meant f'r a compliment ter th' women, or—or th' coo?"

"A'm no' payin' compliments, A'm statin' a gran' truth: a lassie in love wi' a man is th' de'il an' a'—unless ye're th' man—an' twa lassies in love wi' th' same buckie mak' a braw pickle."

"Och, sorr, are th' lasses chasin' yerself, sorr? If so, Oi'll take wan av 'em off y'r hands, an' I won't charge yez overtime f'r me sufferin's."

"Na, ma wee laddie, A've never had ta sleep up trees ta keep 'em at bay ma ainsel'."

Butterfly, who saw that the veteran was in a serious vein, and in no mood to put up with too much of Ginger's banter, took up the tale.

"Shore, Mac, I don't want to amble into th' conversation until you've spun your tale of woe, but I'm guessin' it's Snowie an' Maida Lamarde y're pointin' y'r verbal gun at, eh?"

"Maida an' Annie Laurie, Butterfly."

"Oi haven't seen any outrageous signs av sufferin' on Snowey, meself, sorr."

"Ye dinna ken th' bite o' th' love-bug, Ginger."

"Snowey shore does seem ter bear up remarkable under his affliction, Old Sportsman."

"It's no' him A'm theenkin' o', it's th' twa lassies, Yank."

"Och, ut's aisy, sorr, let 'em toss f'r him; as meself an' th' Sergeant do f'r packets av fags."

"A'm glad ye mentioned th' Sergeant, buckie. A'm no' easy in ma mind aboot him."

"He is off his feed lately, an' that's gospel; I asked him about it, an' he put it down to lumbago."

"It's no' lumbago, Butterfly, it's—th' love-bug bitin'."

"When Oi get a bad bite from that same baste," crooned Ginger, "ut don't put me off me feed, ut only makes me ancesthral pride sit up an' kick, an' Oi take ut out in grub; th' more Oi'm bit, th' more Oi ate; if Oi was ter tumble in love wid two at wanst, Oi'd start a famine."

"Ye"—McGlusky made a large gesture of contempt—"ye theenk wi' y'r stomach, laddie, y'r intellect has na developed, but, by th' breeches o' Cromwell, y'r appetite has, an' eef oor claims dinna pan oot mair gold than they've been doin' lately, A'll ha' ta muzzle ye at meal-times."

"Who's workin' havoc with th' Sergeant's internal e-conomy, Mac?"

"Maida Lamarde."

"An' you think she's on th' pine f'r Snowey?"

"A do."

"Sounds like a pack o' cards looks when Ginger's been stacking 'em."

"Oi wisht Oi had th' shufflin' av this human pack," growled Ginger. "Oi'd cut Maida Lamarde out an' discard her."

"You shore don't seem ter get no friendlier ter her, son."

"Friendlier—me? No, Oi don't, an' Oi won't. Oi said from th' first she did her father in, or she knows th' man that did, an' she's shieldin' him. Oi—Oi seen th' blood on her hand."

"Dinna say tha' in front o' Snowey, wee mannie."

"Is he sweet on Maida?"

"A'm no' sure, Butterfly; ye canna tell wha's eenside Snowey fra surface eendications. Whiles A theenk he's wadin' in th' amber clouds o' love wi' Maida, whiles A theenk he's dreenkin' love draughts fra th' eyes o' Annie Laurie."

"By Mary, thin, y're wrong," growled Ginger. "Judgin' by th' way he thripped over his spurs an' th' unconverted language he spilled over me when I picked him up outside our tent last night, ut was somethin' out av a little fat black bottle he'd been drinkin', sorr. Oi had somethin' out av Annie's eyes—at first—as ye both remember, but ut didn't make *me* walk as if Oi had two left legs."

"If Snowey lost his laigs, son, he most certainly

had some trouble with a stronger spirit than Annie Laurie's."

"He lost both ends av him last night—th' first time Oi iver knowed ut ter happen ter Snowey. He said th' moon was a blinkin' bush-fire, an' kep' me runnin' up an' down in me shirt f'r an hour ter put ut out."

"That's bad, real undiluted trouble mixture, eh, Old Timer?"

"Y're richt, Yank."

Ginger flared up hotly at once in defence of Snowey. "Ut's nothin' ter make a song about; we've all done ut before ter-night."

A flush that was reminiscent of past failings spread over the veteran's face, and his voice was full of pain as he answered—

"We ha', laddie, an' some o' us ha' drunk o' th' cup o' tears f'r daein' it."

Butterfly looked steadily at Ginger, and there was a note of contempt, not often heard in his good-humoured voice, as he said—

"Scripture talk ain't my strong suit, son, an' I don't often drop it around, but there's a sayin' I'd like ter impress on y'r memory, if you possess th' commodity." He paused, then: "'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.'"

Ginger was cut to the quick; his swift imagination conjured up all that the American's rebuke implied. He moved forward from where he was sitting on the earth, moved on hands and knees and nestled in the old digger's arms, as many a time he had done in those days when McGlusky had found him a starving waif of

a seaport slum and taken him to his big, warm, rough old heart. No word was spoken for a long time, and perhaps it was as well that the tent was in shadow. The big man cradled the imp in arms that had fought and wrought for him, and Ginger rubbed his freckled face against the scarred and bearded one. Then—

"Ye didna mean it, ma wee mannie; it were ainly the de'il wi'in ye: dinna fash."

A little later the American broke the constrained silence.

"You shore did not catch the route I intended my remarks to take, son, when I said Snowey's little jazz was some bad f'r him."

"Oi'm a baste! Oi'm like th' bush nigger that wanted ter catch th' snake by th' tail, an' grabbed th' wrong end av ut."

"Bad f'r both," smiled Butterfly, "specially th' nigger, eh?"

"Tell me, Butterfly, why was you so concerned about Snowey an' his little jazz?"

Instantly the Yankee's face became serious. "Sure, son, it's because he might run into Rooney when his laigs wasn't perpendicular, an' then——"

"Och, what about th' day after, when Snowey sobered up?"

"Son, there mightn't be no 'day after.' Rooney's bad, plumb bad; Trooper Jim has heard somethin' concernin' him, somethin' about Rooney's doin's in America on the Texan border; he left them parts unannounced, an' in a blamed hurry, an' if he ever goes back, his obsequies will be sudden, an'—an' shorn of all reverence."

"Be Mary, Snowey scented him f'r a bad egg from th' first, an' so did th' Auld Timer."

"He's a gun man, Ginger."

"Is he, bedad? Thin Oi'll back Snowey av th' Anzacs ag'in him."

"That's just it, son; Snowey has throwed a gun in war so often, he's grown to be a gun man too. Don't you mind how he got inter th' habit of always havin' a gun on his hip when he went inter action in Italy against th' Austrians? He'd pull that gun an' drop man after man, while th' rest of us was busy with the bay'nit in them mountain defiles—an', Ginger, he got ter like it."

"He were always a killer when he was oor best sharpshooter at Gallipoli; he'd mark a Turk down an' lay out all night ta get him at dawn wi' his rifle—th' gun on th' hip cam' later, wee laddie."

"Strange how one gun man scents another, an' always wants ter walk on th' same side o' th' street—ready."

"Butterfly ha' th' richts o' it, an' it only wanted Maida Lamarde ta witch Rooney ta her side, ta wake th' de'il in Snowey."

"Oi don't belave he's mad over Maida."

"Gie us wha's eenside y'r head, buckie, sometimes th' contents air no' all puddin' fillin's."

"Thank ye kindly, sorr. Well, ut's this way I see ut. Snowey thinks a lot in his no showin' way av th' Sergeant."

"We all dae, mannie."

"Let me proceed wid me disquisition av th' case, sorr, as th' bull-ant said ter th' blackbeetle he wanted f'r breakfast."

"Dom all bull-ants," muttered McGlusky, "A had yin in ma kilt th' morn, they dinna discreeminate wha' they ha' f'r breakfast."

"Snowey," proceeded Ginger, "knows y'r auld love-bug is bitin' th' Sergeant, an' he knows Rooney is after Maida, an' Snowey means ter stand in between an' put th' comether on Rooney's little game, for ut's th' girl's gold *he* wants, an' th' fool girl is half in love wid Snowey an' half wid th' Sergeant, an' that puts th' lid on th' pot."

"Buckie, I believe y're no' far frae th' truth. A dinna ken if ye reasoned it a' oot like a buckie o' brains, or if it just cam' ta ye in y'r sleep, but A theenk ye've got it richt."

"Can you tell me, son, why Maida goes so often to Canvas Town, an' gets thicker an' thicker with Rooney?"

"Oi can, Butterfly."

"Why, kid?"

"She's rotten ter th' core av her, Oi always said so, an' bedad she is."

"A have no' been ta Canvas Toon since th' nicht A tuk ma pipes in, an' that's a lang time noo; oor claims air no' pannin' oot weel, sae A bided hame, but A'll gie th' place a keek, A'm theenkin', an' dae a bit diplomacy, an' straighten oot some o' this coil, an' tha' reminds ma, A've a wee bittie ploy ta settle wi' Mister Rooney ma ainsel'. Just pass ma ower ma twa guns, Butterfly, maybe they need a bit attention; eef Rooney's a gun man wi' a record, an' Trooper Jim is na leear, he's th' straightest man in th' mounted p'leece in a' th' back country, why Mr. Rooney may as weel ken Jamie de McGlusky is na weaklin'."

"You an' y'r diplomacy, sorr," growled Ginger, pointing a scornful finger at the two big guns Butterfly had handed to the veteran; "fine diplomacy ut will be wid you shootin' holes in Rooney, an' him perhaps lettin' daylight inter yerself, an' all f'r th' sake av Maida Lamarde. Don't I know she's at th' back av all y'r minds? An' she not worth a drop av th' blood ter be spilt—except Rooney's. Oi've said from th' first she's th' mother av trouble, an', be Mary, Oi'm right."

"Wee laddie, ye remin' me o' a Scots dame A kenned in Edinburgh."

"Faith thin, y'r Scotch dame must ha been a bit av a curiosity—f'r a faymale, sorr."

McGlusky's eyes took on the sly twinkle that made his grim face so lovable.

"It was no' her looks, laddie, it were her speech. She were watchin' th' Highlan' Brigade march by in a' their splendour, an' her son Jock who had just joined up as a raw recruity were marchin', or tryin' ta march wi' them, an' his mither cried oot: 'Look, neebours, look, ain't it wonnerfu', there's a' those michty men' o' war marchin' an'—all o' them oot o' step wi' th' music—excep' oor Jock.'"

"Well, sorr, Oi'm out av step wid you all over Maida Lamarde, an' Oi'm glad av ut."

Later that night, when every one else was asleep, McGlusky stood in the starlight under his banner, and looked over the whole group of Tiger Claims.

"None o' ye worth th' sweat ye've cost," he grumbled, "excep' th' Sergeant's, an' his is na great shakes, just a han'fu' o' nuggets noo an' again in it,

but eef it was no' f'r those same few nuggets, we'd ha' ta quit." He loaded his pipe, and smoked until the pipe was nearly empty, and he was thinking furiously as he smoked. "Th' worst batch o' claims on th' whole rush, an' A laid ma laddies on ta 'em." He cut another pipeful. "A canna unnerstan' it, A had th' 'feelin'' they were good when A pegged out ma ain an' th' laddies', an' every day th' 'feelin'' o' gold unner ma feet ha' grown stronger. A never knew th' 'feelin'' ta play ma false before in a' ma life." He lit up and pulled at the pipe slowly and thoughtfully. "A canna get rid o' th' 'feelin',' it's on ma noo; every old digger kens it, it's a half-sister ta secon' sicht." He looked over the great heaps of dirt he and his mates had dug up and put through their machines. "Losh, but we've toiled like men, an' wha' wi' th' cost o' leevin' an' th' price o' watter f'r oor beasties, oor pooches air as lean as th' shanks o' a wolf." He flung himself down at full length by a pile of worked-out dirt. "Wha's wrang wi' ye, Jamie de McGlusky? Is it th' aristocracy that cam' to ye wi' th' 'de' that's spoilin' y'r f'r a prospector? It's no' th' love-bug bitin', f'r A'm no' in love, though A'll admit th' love-bug did gie ma a wee bit o' a nibble when first A saw Maida Lamarde, but it was no' a bite. A've no' been in touch wi' ma speerit frien's f'r a waesome time; A won'er eef A cud ca' yin o' them to help ma noo. A dinna want ta fail this time f'r th' sake o' th' buckies who trustit all ta ma judgment."

He put his pipe by his side, and after a few minutes' silent reflection, he selected a "spirit" suitable for his present needs.

"Air ye ram'lin' roon these pairts, Geordie? Ye were hard ta beat as a gold-digger when ye were here, though eef ye've no' changed y'r spots since ye crossed th' border, y're mair likely ta be hangin' roon' a saloon in Canvas Toon th' nicht than ta be handy ta help an old mate."

The spirit of the departed Geordie might have been in Canvas Town, or in some other region where drink was less plentiful. McGlusky got no answer.

He lifted his body to change his position, and thought he saw something moving on the Sergeant's claim.

"A'm hopin' th' love-bug is no' keepin' th' Sergeant awake—dom th' bug."

A little later he was sure he could see a form creeping on the Sergeant's claim, and a new thought came to him.

"Yon's no honest man; maybe it's yin o' th' Swedes Maida ha' employed ta help her work her claim." He watched, and began to use language as piquant as pickles, under his breath. "Th' dom gold-thief, he's after th' bit patch where th' Sergeant struck his last nugget; eef A can creep up close ta him, A'll gie him yin kick tha' will bring th' end he sits on an' th' end he thinks wi' sae close thegither, he'll no' have need f'r a shirt-collar to th' day he dies—th' blastie."

The two Swedes Maida had put on to work as wages men were of that large number of adventurers who had arrived too late to peg out claims for themselves anywhere near the gold-find, and being penniless were only too glad to get work at a pound per day and their grub. They were apparently a couple of honest,

hardworking fellows, who did what they were told, and gave no trouble. One dug the earth, the other shovelled it into the dry-blower, and Maida rocked the machine and collected the gold.

Creeping through the starlight with the noiseless stealth of a panther looting a camp, McGlusky drew nearer and nearer to his quarry. He gritted his teeth, for the robber was kneeling right by the hole where the Sergeant had found a nice five-ounce nugget just before quitting work for the day. Head, shoulders and arms were out of sight down the shallow hole, but the broadest part of the night-hawk's anatomy was in view.

McGlusky gently drew one leg up and felt the toe of his footwear. "Only ma old camp slippers," he muttered. "Losh, A weesh it were ma iron-shod Alpine boots A had on, A'd mak' ye cough."

He rose swiftly, swung his leg and kicked, but the loose earth on which his other foot rested gave way under him, and only about a fiftieth part of the energy he had expended on the kick took effect. The figure of the claim-prowler shot bodily into the hole, and an appalling yell came from down under.

"Aye, ye ma' squawk; it was no' a good yin A gied ye, but it will do—f'r a start."

All the Tiger Claim men came from their tents, and Snowey's voice wanted to know the meaning of the earthquake.

"It's just naething at a', laddie; A just stubbed ma toe inta something saft tha' were stealin' oor bit gold, an' it screechit as eef it were hurtit."

"Want any help, Mac?"

"Help—ma? Na, na; gang back ta y'r blankets, buckies; A'll gie this gommeril a taste o' ma belt."

A chorus of laughter broke from the little group, and they went back to blankets, for there was a nip in the night air.

Mac jumped down the hole and bent over the huddled-up figure that crouched there.

"Come oot o' it, ye sneak thief; A'm waesome sorry A didna ha' a decent boot on, ye'd ha' something ta greet aboot. Noo A'm gawn ta lay ma belt where A placed ma boot. Get up an' strip off. A want ta see ma fut work."

"G-o a-w-a-y, Mr. McG-l-u-s-ky."

If the real earthquake suggested by Snowey had broken loose just then, the old digger could not have been more surprised. He struck a match and peered down into a white face, with long golden hair streaming all round it. The match burnt to the veteran's finger and thumb before he found his tongue. Then he gasped—

"By ma old grey gods—eet's Miss Maida."

"Go a-w-a-y, you've k-i-ck-ed me i-n h-a-l-f."

"Bide a wee, bide a jiffy, ma lassie, A've some oils in ma tent; A'll put ye richt in a jiffy."

"You won't."

The way the girl snapped those two words out told Mac that if he really had kicked her in half, the half that was left was very much alive.

"Shall A carry ye back ta y'r tent, lassie?"

"Wh-e-re are the others?"

"Snorin' the cradle song by now, ma dear."

"I'm not your dear."

This came very tartly from the injured girl.

"Ye air that—f'r th' noo."

"Well, I don't want to be if this is how you treat your dears."

"A'll mak' ye drop hot watter, an' a sponge an' some oil wull——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort."

"Gie ma y'r pardon, A'm forgettin' y're a hen."

"Carry me to my tent."

This came with strange imperiousness from a detected claim-prowler.

McGlusky lifted her in his arms, and even in her pained condition she wondered at the strength of him; she knew she was no more than summer thistledown in his arms.

"Ye're na heavier than a smile," he remarked as his long legs took him over the ground.

Arrived at her tent, he was greeted at first in a hostile manner by the big staghound chained to a stake at the foot of her bed. A word from the girl quieted the beast.

"Lay me on my blankets—gently."

He obeyed as if he and not she had been caught red-handed claim-prowling.

"A'll gang find ma horse an' ride ta Canvas Toon an' bring oot Annie Laurie; ye're friendly wi' her, an' she's a hen."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Mr. McGlusky."

"For why no'?"

"Do you think a woman would let another woman know a man had—kicked her, if she could help it?"

"It were a gude job A didn't kick ye hard, Miss Maida."

"Didn't you? I—I thought you did."

"A meant ta," he confessed, "but ma foot slippit. A'm gey glad it were only a wee yin ye got, lassie. Y're sae light, A'm theenkin' ye'd be flyin' yet eef A'd had boots on' an' got ye fair."

"Why didn't you speak before you—you kicked?"

"A thocht ye were a claim-thief, an' claim-thieves maistly gae armed, an' ye dinna gie them warnin', ye ken."

"I understand."

"A thocht it were yin o' y'r Swedes."

"They're as honest as I am."

That started McGlusky thinking.

"Lassie, wha' were ye daein' on th' Sergeant's claim in th' middle o' th' nicht? Men ha' been shot f'r less."

"I hate to tell you, Mr. McGlusky."

"Ye'll ha' te tell."

"I know I shall." The girl spoke with sudden bitterness. "I shall have to tell you now, unless I want you to turn against me. I know what Ginger thinks I am, and you have never made up your mind about me; and Snowey—Snowey is not sure concerning me; the only one of the Tiger crowd who trusts me thoroughly is the Englishman you call the Sergeant. The Yankee Butterfly Brown hasn't made up his mind, and doesn't want to, for fear the verdict will go against me, and he's kind by nature."

"You're thinkin' o' y'r father?"

"You know I am—of my father and the way he died."

"It were awesome th' way he died, a strong man

done ta death from behind, wi'oot a chance o' a fecht."

"Do you think I—I had a hand in that?"

"Eef A were sure ye did, wee lassie, A theenk A'd lay a grup on y'r white throat wi' ma han' noo, in th' name o' justice."

"You're not *sure* in your own mind, McGlusky, that I'm innocent?"

Their eyes met in a long, fierce, penetrating gaze. McGlusky, who all his life had known and felt the power and lure of sex, often to his after sorrow and shame-faced regret, felt then the woman's magnetism, for never had she seemed so fair in his eyes or so desirable, as at that moment, yet the rugged honesty of the man, never far out of call, would not let him lie, or shirk the issue.

"Answer me."

"No, lassie, A am no' certain."

The girl turned her head wearily on her rough pillow, "So I *must* tell you why I was on the Sergeant's claim to-night or it will add to your doubts of me: and, McGlusky, I need you—need all the few friends I have, and every man of the Tiger crowd—even that little demon Ginger, though he thinks me a murderess."

"For why dae ye need us?"

"The man who butchered my father is on this field."

McGlusky was on his feet, crouching a little on account of his height, and the room in the tent. Something shone from his fierce old face that townsmen might not have understood; it was the spirit of bush justice, for to men of his type born in the wilds and

nurtured on its mysteries, the shambling of a bushman was as much a personal matter as if the dead man were son or brother. To kill in fair and open fight did not seem a crime against God or man to him; in his eyes it was and always had been the universal law; but to kill treacherously, by stealth, in the dark, from behind, for that vengeance must be taken. He looked terrible as he crouched over the girl, an implacable, unforgiving, remorseless being, to whom the law of an eye for an eye was as the breath of life in his nostrils.

"Gie me th' man's name an' th' proof!"

That last sentence was typical of the Anzac nation—"The proof"—he must have that first, the vengeance he would answer for.

"I do not know his name."

"Describe the man."

"I cannot; I do not know that I have ever seen him."

"Make y'r speech plain, A'm gropin' in th' dark."

"So am I. Listen, Mr. McGlusky, for weeks past some one has been spreading the rumour through the camp that I killed my own father."

"How dae ye ken tha'?"

"Because men, and women too, in Canvas Town have turned against me without cause or reason. Men do not come to ask me to dance with them when I go to the dance-hall. Only two ever dance with me now: when they are not there, I sit out the dances, yet I am the best dancer in the camp, excepting Annie Laurie. Women do not speak to me—now, only Annie."

"Who air th' twa men who dance wi' ye?"

"Snowey and Rooney."

"A leeon an' a jackal."

"I think so."

"Then why dae ye dance wi' th' jackal?"

The girl's lips twisted in a queer smile.

"You know your Bible, McGlusky?"

"Backwards."

"Well, what does it say about the way of a maid?"

"Naething—but a wee bittie aboot th' way o' a man wi' a maid."

"It comes to the same thing when you apply it to human life. Now listen." Again she held him by some hidden force. "I was at the dance-hall to-night, before I came to your claim."

"The Sergeant's claim."

"The same thing; you all share and share alike."

"Weel, get on ta it."

"I was hissed as I crossed the floor, and some one called out 'We want no murderesses here.'"

"Did ye see th' man who said it?"

"No."

"Were Snowey there?"

"No."

"Ye'd ha' heard a gun go off if he had been."

"Why?"

"Snowey wad fecht f'r th' lass he loves eef she were dyed wi' a' th' fires o' hell—it's Snowey's way."

"The lass he loves—you think he loves me?"

"A dae."

"I think he loves Annie Laurie."

"A'm theenkin' y're wrong; it's yersel' he loves, an' so does th' Sergeant."

"The Sergeant is one of the manliest men I know.

"Yes, an' ye'll never ken a manlier than ma Snowey, no' even ma Ginger."

The girl smiled; she had small cause to love Ginger. She dismissed the love subject.

"The reason I think the man who killed my father is in camp, is that only a man who wanted me out of the way would spread such a rumour. I have never had an enemy of my own in my life; the man who did my father to death must have known something about me, and if he knew anything he would know I would spend my whole life hunting him down—know that is why I am here."

"A'm followin' y'r logic, ye're no daft."

"The diggers will drive me away if they once get it firmly into their heads I am my father's killer."

"They will."

"Will you stand by me, Mr. McGlusky?"

There was a long pause, then—

"A will, an' A pledge a' th' Tiger crowd."

"Barring Ginger."

The girl said this with a sad little smile.

"Lassie, A'll answer f'r Ginger as A wad f'r ma own soul."

"He thinks me guilty."

"As guilty as th' de'il, lassie, but ye dinna ken ma wee laddie; he were cradled on comradeship—a' th' cradle th' puir wee mannie ever had—an', lassie, ma ainsel' an' Snowey air his comrades. Ginger will forget a' else, but tha'; he micht hate ye like blazes, A'm no' sure he doesna, but gin me an' Snowey fecht f'r ye, Ginger will fecht too, an' he's worth a lot when things air doin', ye can bet y'r new bruises on tha'."

"Thank you. I—I'm glad you kicked me to-night, Mr. McGlusky."

"A didna theenk ye'd get much pleasure oot o' it, lass.'

"I shouldn't have had this chance to talk to you if you had not."

"Everything in life is mixed wi' marcy, even a booting. Noo tell ma why were ye on th' Tiger Claim th' nicht?"

"I was putting a few nuggets into the loose earth left by the Sergeant."

McGlusky stood for a while, too dumbfounded to speak; then a wave of unreasoning rage took possession of him.

"Ye were puttin' nuggets *inta* oor ground? Ye've done it afore, dinna lee ta ma."

"Yes, my claim was rich; all of your ground was poor, too poor to be worth working. The Sergeant is no digger, I could salt his claim without him guessing it, you would have found me out long ago, so would Snowey."

"I did," drawled the voice of the Sharpshooter from the shadow near the opening of the tent.

"Wha' air ye daein' there? Air ye spyin' on ma?"

"Guess you oughter know if I'd spy on a pal or not, Old Timer."

"Perhaps it was *me* you were watching, Snowey?"

"Well, in a way it was, Maida. Your dog barked an' woke me; I looked at your tent, an' saw a light, an' I—well, I wondered, an' I watched."

"What did you watch for?"

"I saw a man's shadow on th' canvas, an'——"

"Well?"

"I waited f'r th' man."

"You thought I had a man visiting my tent—in the night?"

"I shore did, an' as he didn't come out, I came across."

As he spoke the Sharpshooter's hands fell instinctively on the butts of the big ugly guns on his hips. Maida's face was white with wrath.

"Who did you think was here?"

"Well, I figured it might be Rooney."

"And if it had been?"

"He'd have stayed here—permanent."

"How much of our talk have you heard?"

"The last bit, that's all. I just arrove; my patience had all wore out."

"Weel, buckie, it's no' Rooney, it's ma."

"I'm some surprised, Old Sportsman; you might ha' given me a light f'r my feet."

"Meanin' wha', laddie?"

"Meanin' I never even guessed you an' Maida was workin' in double harness; I'd ha' knowed there was no need ter watch her tent if I'd knowed that; you can look after your own, Mac."

"Ye're a dom fule; in a' th' years we've forgathered thegither, A've never felt like gie'in' ye ma blessin' wi' this."

The pioneer digger shook a big bony fist in the Sharpshooter's face.

"As a blessin'," drawled Snowey, "I shore wouldn't pay more'n th' market price f'r it, Mac."

"A'm no' here makin' love, ye gommeril."

"Old Timer, if you was to tell me you was here teachin' Maida th' art o' bee-cultivatin' I'd believe

you; leastways, if I didn't believe you, I'd accept th' situation—you're my mate."

"A've no' been talkin' aboot bees."

"Collectin' honey instead, matey? Well, it's your right, an' I apologise f'r buttin' in."

"I wish I was a man," cried Maida passionately.

"Can't have both sides o' th' game, girlie—good-night."

"Halt!"

The old military order burst from McGlusky's throat like a mastiff's challenge. Snowey wheeled and faced the pair again.

"Laddie, ye mauna gang lik' tha', it's no' fair ta th' lassie. Hark ta ma. A caught her on th' Sergeant's claim th' nicht; A thocht she were a gold-thief; ye heard her squawk when A kicked her."

"You, Mac—you kicked Maida?"

"A did, an' she's got th' mark o' it, but bein' a hen she——"

Maida reached up, and catching McGlusky by the beard, pulled his head down and clapped her other hand over his mouth.

"If you tell him, I'll—I'll hate you, McGlusky."

"Verra weel, A'll no' tell. Le' go ma beard, A'm no' an airship breakin' fra its moorin's, A'll no float awa'."

Maida freed the digger and sank back on her pillow, and her pain was evident.

"Bide still, ye fule lassie," crooned McGlusky, as if speaking to a sick child, "ye'd na beesness ta try an' sit oop after th' kick A gied ye."

Snowey had hard work to suppress the chuckle in his throat, for those words of the veteran's told him the whole story.

"A carried Maida here after—after she fell doon th hole on th' Sergeant's claim, an' we had a crack, buckie; A'll tell ye aboot tha' later; wha' A want ta say noo is th' Sergeant's claim's a duffer like th' rest A selectit f'r ye a'."

"Luck o' th' game: no one's goin' ter squeal, old mate."

"A ken tha' weel, tha's why it hurts ma. Y're a' sae dom loyal ta a leader."

"To a leader worth callin' a leader, yes."

"Weel, Snowey, yon lassie ha' been saltin' th' Sergeant's groon' wi' nuggets."

"I shore knew it, I told you so at first."

"When did ye ken it?"

"Th' day th' Sergeant struck th' first bunch of nuggets."

"Hoo did ye guess?"

"Didn't guess—I saw her tracks fresh made in th' dirt by th' hole where th' Sergeant found th' gold, an' I sensed th' play."

"Snowey——"

"Drop it out like gentle rain from heaven, old mate."

"Don't ye see we've been leevin' on a—a wumman?"

Rage, shame, humiliation, all blended in the digger's rugged face and voice.

"I shore didn't see it at first, old mate; I thought she was doin' it out o' love f'r th' Englishman, an'—I wouldn't spoil her play."

"We shared what th' Sergeant found, laddie."

"Yes; I didn't think of it at the time, an' when I did, I jest kep' on hopin' one of us would strike it rich, then——"

"Weel, wha' then?"

"Then I'd still have kept Maida's secret, but I'd ha' made her take her gold back out o' my share o' our find—now the wallaby's in th' wheat-patch."

McGlusky stood between the man and the maid, his rugged features working.

"Wha' can A dae?" He threw his hands out with a big gesture. "A've never taken help fra a wumman since A was weaned, an' A feel ma manhood's shamed, an' A canna be wrath wi' sic a mate." Then, very wistfully, "Eef ye only had a dirty streak in ye somewhere, Snowey, so as A cud mak' an excuse ta hit ye, just yince."

Snowey smiled.

"I'm not longin' f'r any special marks o' affection, old mate; we got bushed over this job somehow; perhaps we'll find a way out if we don't get rattled. It's gettin' near dawn, we'd better be shakin' a leg f'r camp; th' whole damn valley will be hummin' with talk about as clean as a dingo's den if any one sees us leavin'—come on, mate."

Possibly no men living know the full meaning of that simple word "mate" as the men of Australia and New Zealand do: it means more than a blood tie; it is the bond of the bush, and the great open spaces, where two who are mates are closer together than kinsmen or sundered further than the poles.

McGlusky, with a curt farewell to the girl, went away.

Snowey did not speak to the lass; he just gave her a look and a wave of his hand, and she pulled her blankets round her, dressed as she was, and tried to forget him and all her cares in slee p.

CHAPTER X

THE INSPIRATION OF GINGER

The Tiger Claim crowd were at breakfast; an unusual air of quietness and restraint hung over them; only Ginger and Butterfly seemed to have even a remnant of the careless freedom characteristic of gold-diggers generally. The Yankee, like the big, good-natured boy he really was at heart, strove once or twice to break through the reserve; he started off by rallying Ginger over a new handkerchief of gorgeous colours the Irish imp had knotted round his throat.

"Say, kid, where did you assimilate that silk rainbow you're wearin'? Is it a love-token from th' little bit o' honey-in-th'-comb at Th' Kangaroo an' Emu saloon, or—or somethin' y're wearin' as a sign you'll never drown your neck in soap an' water?"

"Ye belong to an enterprisin' an' inquisitive nation, Yank, wid a jaynius f'r mindin' other people's business. You let me joy-rags alone."

"I'll bet three fags she didn't give it to you, son."

"Och, thin, ut's a bet, an' you've lost, Butterfly. She—she forced ut on me, tied it round me neck wid her own lily-white hands—fork out them fags."

"Take 'em out o' th' three hundred an' sixty-five you owe me, son," gurgled the Yank, delighted at having drawn Ginger so easily.

The Irish lad waxed scornful over this suggestion.

"A mate that expects ter get paid back f'r fags he's

forced on a mate oughter be runnin' a money-lendin' emporium in th' Bowery," he jeered.

"If," chuckled Butterfly, "y'r little forgit-me-not didn't have ter use more force ter make you accept that silk panorama of a sunset an' a moonlit risin' badly mixed than I had ter make you smoke my fags, she didn't bruise her fingers worth makin' a dirge about."

"Och, she gave it," grinned Ginger, "wid a grace an' freedom, after Oi'd admired ut verbally ter some extent—a grace an' freedom, Butterfly, that made me feel Oi was conferrin' a favour on her by acceptin' ut; there's a way ter give a prisent, an' a way ter accept th' same, Yank."

"You sure do excel at th' acceptin' end, kid."

"Ut's a gift Oi've got, an' Oi cultivate me gifts, savee; she gave me a silver cigarette-case on me birthday."

"How many blessed birthdays do you have a year, son?"

"Oi conjure up wan, Butterfly, whiniver Oi see things comin' my way."

"A hope ye didna ask th' lassie f'r yon siller fag-holder, wee buckie."

"Ax her? Me? No, sorr; Oi happened ter say that was th' first thing Oi was goin' ter trate meself to when our old claims run into luck; she happened ter be helpin' herself ter a fag out av ut at the moment; we was doin' a bit av a pasear in th' moonlight at th' time, sorr."

"A'm theenkin' A unnerstan', ye blastie."

"She didn't rise to it—at first, so Oi sang f'r her as we walked; she's alwis at me ter sing, an' Oi sung *Th' Bright May Moon is shinin'*, an' she slipped her hand

in mine when Oi put th' tremolos in—bedad, th' moonlight's th' time ter put th' comether on a lass, ut gets under their hair an' drives 'em loco. Th' silver cigarette-case didn't seem ter be comin' my way very fast, so Oi sang *Kiss me, an' say Good-bye-e-e!*"

"Weel, and wha' happened?"

"Th' cigarette-case happened, sorr."

"If you ever *do* meet th' right girl, son, I hope th' love-bug bites you where it hurts most."

The freckles on Ginger's face seemed to stand on edge, so wide was his grin when he heard Snowey's pithy speech.

"Love," he jeered, "Oi'll give yez my recipe f'r stoppin' th' bite av th' bug from spoilin' y'r appetite—ut's love 'em promiscuous an'—an' bid 'em ajoo."

"Weel, come an' mak' love ta y'r dry-blower, ma mannie, f'r if we dinna strike a patch come Saturday, we'll ha' ta quit."

Ginger rose excitedly.

"Bedad, sorr, Butterfly's blether about faymales drove me drame out av me head."

"Did ye dream ye were workin', sonny?"

"Oi did not, sorr, be Mary, that's no drame——Worruk, hard worruk's th' purgatory av motion."

The old digger was proceeding to his daily duties, when the imp pulled his sleeve.

"Sorr——"

"Weel, ma buckie?"

"Oi want to tell yez me drame, sorr."

"Cut it oot, laddie, things air no' weel wi' us."

"Let me tell ut you, sorr, five times Oi've dramed th' same things about th' Tiger."

"Meanin' ma claim?"

"Th' same, sorr."

"Dinna play wi' ma, ma wee mannie, ma hairt's gey sore th' morn."

"Is ut, sorr?" Ginger crept close as a dog that loves its master does: "Oi wudden't hurt yez, sorr; Oi'd cheat a church ter get th' ointment ter aise y'r sores, sorr, Oi wud, an' ye know ut."

"Wha' were y'r five dreams, buckie?"

The digger's voice was gruff, but his hand passed lovingly over the red head lifted towards his own. A tremor of excitement crept into Ginger's voice.

"Sorr, I dramed Oi saw yerself pull doon y'r Tiger banner."

"Tha' wull come true, A fear, f'r, laddie, we're broke."

"Och, we're not; Oi belave me drame. Oi saw yerself an' me an' Snowey sinkin' a hole like a well, not in clay, sorr, but in th' white cement at th' bottom av our claims, th' stuff yerself calls bed-rock."

"Wha' did we strike, buckie—watter? There's a sma' fortune in watter right here, eef we cud strike it."

"Water? Be Mary, ut was not water, sorr, ut was gold. Oi saw yerself pull out a lump av cement as big as y'r head, all stuck tergether wid gold, sorr; ut was not like th' gold we get in th' clay, ut was all threads an' knots, an' every thread burnished like a bay'nit. Oi've never seen gold like that. Oi woke up sweatin'."

McGlusky stood frowning.

"Ye belave me, sorr?"

"A dae, mannie; ye'd be fit f'r na ither place tha' a cage in th' Zoo eef ye were leein' ta ma noo."

Snowey, who had been listening attentively to the dream story, put in a few words.

"Do you remember th' gold that was found in cement at Kanowna before the war, Mac?"

"Ye mean th' place th' boys called 'The White Feather'?"

"Yes, that's what th' diggers christened it before th' gold was found in cement."

"A mind it weel; A went ta peg oot a claim there, but A got wind o' it too late. Ma certie, tha' were gold—an' noo A come ta theenk o' it, th' cement were held thegither wi' threads an' knots o' polished gold, just as Ginger says he saw in his dream."

"Ever hear or read about th' cement claims at White Feather in West Australia, kid?"

"Oi niver heard or read av y'r auld White Feather or Kanowna ayther, Snowey."

"Mannie," interpolated the old digger, "A'm gawn ta follow y'r dream an' see if it's a true vision." Then, turning to the Sharpshooter, he added: "Ye ken, Snowey, oor speerit frien's often try ta help us, but f'r some reason they canna mak' us unnerstan' at times; then, eef there's a fittin' instrument near by, they use it, an' gie us th' knowledge we desire. A kenned a racin' mon yince who had an eediot son, an' a week before th' Melbourne Cup was ta be run, th' eediot used to look at his daddy every mornin' at breakfast an' say solemnly 'G-L-E-N-L-O-T-H'—just tha' yin word an' nae mair, an' th' racin' man, who always had a bet on th' Melbourne Cup, asked th' bookmakers wha' price they wad lay Glenloth, a horse tha' had never won a race, an' they chased him all ower Melbourne wi' offers of a hunner poonds ta yin."

"A hundred to one, Mac; yes, that was Glenloth's

price; he started at that; I had five bob on him, for th' sake o' the odds, an' he won."

"He did," said McGlusky—"he won in a thunderin' heavy doonpour o' rain. A was there, an' th' blastie never won anither race ta th' day o' his death, no' yin."

"Och, sorr, did y'r racin' friend back ut afther th' tip he got ivery mornin' for a week?"

"He did not, Ginger; he said a horse th' bookies would lay a hundred to yin aboot on th' day o' th' race cudden't have a thoosan' ta yin chance o' winnin', an' he backed th' favourite an' dropped a packet."

"Sorr——"

"Weel, buckie?"

"Who did yez say was th' idiot in that family—th' daddy or th' son?"

Snowey gurgled in his throat, as he saw how the imp had turned the tables on the pioneer and driven home the moral of his dream. For a moment McGlusky looked as if he'd like to swing a leg in Ginger's direction, but his eyes twinkled.

"Ye snapped ma wind tha' time, ye blastie. Noo come awa', we'll see th' stuff dreams air ma' o'."

Grimly he had looked at his "banner," the Tiger colours he had always sworn should float over his native land, if a republic came in his day.

"Noo f'r th' luck o' th' Tiger."

He hauled down his colours, and he, Ginger, and Snowey set to work as if their lives depended on it, to clear away the little patch of solid earth that alone remained intact on the old digger's claim. The two experienced men worked as if fired by the frenzy that at times comes to diggers when they feel their star is guiding them; Ginger, burning with the gambling

mania so often inherent in men of his race. When they reached bed-rock and the bluish-white cement, pretty near as hard as granite, lay under their feet, Snowey and McGlusky stood upright and looked hard into each other's eyes. They were both thrilling, but each knew how to hold the safety-valve of feeling by the throttle.

"Put in a shot now, eh, Mac?"

"Aye, buckie."

The pioneer clambered up out of his claim, strode to his tent which he had shifted to a piece of waste ground a week earlier, and soon returned with hammer, drill, dynamite, fuse, and detonators.

Mac knelt with the drill gripped in his two hands.

"Beat f'r ma, Snowey."

"Let th' kid have th' first few strokes f'r luck, Old Sport—it's his dream."

"Richt, Snowey. Losh, but ye've th' marrow o' bush justice in y'r innards."

Ginger was overjoyed, so much so that the first stroke of the heavy hammer nearly ended the veteran's interest in the claim, and everything else earthly.

"It's th' steel drill ye ha' ta drive inta th' cement, no' me, laddie," he cooed, and Ginger flushed under the sarcasm, and struck a few blows steadily and truly.

"Noo gie th' hammer ta Snowey, an' watch hoo th' Anzacs work."

"Oi will that; th' auld crystal-gazer in Agypt said Oi was meant f'r an overseer," giggled the imp, and then Snowey made the big hammer fly, and the old digger turned and twisted the drill with hands that gripped like a vice.

Two holes they drove into the cement, three feet

deep, then in went a couple of plugs of dynamite into each hole with the detonator well squeezed into each top plug, and the fuse attached. Then came the swift but careful tamping of the holes, the old digger using the dust of the cement the drill had made, and all was ready.

Butterfly and the Sergeant had been looking on, keenly interested in the fateful experiment.

Ginger grew suddenly white to the lips; he knew the passion of hope he had roused in the hearts of the two grim men he loved, and if the experiment were a failure, there would be few sadder hearts than his in Anzac-land.

"Steady, old son."

Snowey had seen the sudden pallor in the freckled face, and he guessed the cause.

"Oi'm steady, Snowey, an', be Mary, Oi'll back me drame."

"So'll I somehow," came the soft musical drawl, "though when *I* dream of good luck, kid, a dog bites me, or a horse kicks me, or a 'copper' makes inquisitive remarks concernin' my means o' gettin' a livelihood."

Then McGlusky's voice stopped Snowey's flow of talk that had been set in motion in order to take the imp out of himself and ease the strain on his emotional nature.

"Shake a leg, Sergeant, an', Butterfly, get up an' gang a distance an' look oot f'r chunks o' cement comin' doon. Snowey, ye an' ma wee laddie, licht th' twa fuses."

"No, sorr, don't break me drame, ut's your job."

The grim digger chuckled.

"Weel, A'll no' fecht wi' destiny."

He struck a match.

"You young liar," whispered Snowey, "you invented that last bit; I read it in your eyes."

"Stan' ready ta rin."

The next moment the two lengths of fuse began to splutter fire sparks.

"Come on, kid, a chunk of gold in the right place can kill as well as lead, I guess."

They all three ran like school-boys on a frolic, and clambered up the side of the Claim, and bolted a distance for safety.

There was a sudden crash which caused men all along the valley to stare in the direction of the Tiger Claim in amazement, for no explosions had been needed to break down clay, and no man had thought of the cement underneath. The débris flew high, for the four plugs of dynamite sunk at the proper angle had done their work well. But stuff was still falling as McGlusky leapt down to the hole; he was not the man to fear to look his luck in the face, good or bad. He knelt by the cavity the dynamite had made, reached his big hands down and wrenched away a chunk of loosened cement about as big as his head, gave one glance at it, and then rose to his full height and raised the lump high above his head in both hands. His rough-hewn face was like carven granite, but his eyes were blazing. His comrades pressed round him. No need to ask what the luck was; the cement was simply matted together with gold, and Ginger's weird dream stood proven true.

Maida Lamarde had limped down to see why the shot had been fired; she stood just outside the circle made by the little group, and watched their exultation keenly.

Ginger was wild with delight, yet tried to curb his

feelings as much as possible after the Anzac manner. Butterfly Brown threw restraint to the winds; he tossed his old felt hat high, and when it fell he made a football of it, then turned and playfully pommelled the Sergeant, who for once forgot his British phlegm and gave as good as he got. Snowey with one hand sunk deeply in his breeches pocket, lounged near; no stranger looking on would have conceived the idea that the Sharpshooter was co-equal with the others in the great discovery. Butterfly jumped at him.

"Laugh, you graven image—dance, sing, or bust up in some human fashion, you—you chip off the Sphinx."

"Look at him." As Snowey made this reply to the Yankee's outburst, he indicated the old digger, who still held the treasure aloft. "Looks like one o' th' old Vikin's, offerin' up sacrifice to Thor or Odin, don't he, Butterfly? An' ain't he proud? He's bustin' with th' pride o' success, not f'r th' gold's sake, but because he's proved himself once again McGlusky the pioneer, McGlusky the leader o' men. I tell you, Yank, he 'sensed' that gold th' day he hung his black an' yeller shirt up f'r a banner an' christened th' claim th' Tiger."

The veteran proved the next moment how well Snowey had gauged his real nature. Slowly he drew his arms down, swiftly he stepped to Ginger's side and thrust the glittering mass into the youth's hands.

"Th' firstfruits o' y'r dream, wee mannie."

The lad gripped the gift, fascinated as all men are when first they see raw gold in quantity.

"Th' kid shore is a champion dreamer," remarked Snowey with his slow half-smile, "Shake on it, son; when we go down ter see th' Melbourne Cup run I'm

goin' ter put a race card under y'r pillow every night, an' sleep with my ear agen your mouth to hear what you say in y'r sleep."

"He's beat his old crystal-gazer ter blazes as a seer, an' that's a fact," chortled Butterfly, but the veteran digger brought them back to serious things. He raised his hand with the old habit of command, enjoining silence.

"Ma laddies, we owe a duty ta every mon on th' field, an' we must pay it; we've been verra lucky, an' th' old grey gods usin' yon feeble eenstrument as their mouthpiece ha' pointed th' way f'r us; they dinna always use th' michty an' th' strong, all doon th' ages we humans ha' had proof tha' th' gods often choose their messengers fra th' simplest o' oor kind."

He beamed on Ginger as if he had paid him the highest compliment in his power, and Ginger, his keen sense of humour tickled to the cracking point, bowed, hat in hand.

"Och, sorr, don't flatter me ter death, share some av that stuff out ter Butterfly, he's nadin' ut."

A gesture from the old digger silenced him.

"Ma buckies, we between us a' ha' mad' a gran' discovery; noo we ha' ta spread th' news, so tha' na sharps ma' get ta learn it, an' buy th' claims frae th' diggers f'r a song—it's th' law o' th' wilds tha' na mon shall hog th' earth an' th' fullness o' it. Snowey, gie ma a tin dish, A'm gawn ta call a 'roll up.'"

He took one of the big tin dishes that had been used for dry-blowing before he made the machines, and in his other hand he held the steel drill. Standing on top of his claim with his mates and the girl near by, he beat a wild tattoo on the bottom of the dish.

'Sounds like th' drummin' thim dancin' dervishes used ter favour us wid in Egypt," commented Ginger. "What does ut mane, anyway, eh?"

"Look an' see," was Snowey's brief retort.

"Be Mary, he's set th' whole valley makin' th' same kind av music."

"He has, son, and don't you ever do it unless you've got a good reason: no digger will refuse to answer that call, not if he's wallowin' in gold, it's th' justice call o' th' Anzac wilds."

It was as the Irish lad had stated. Every digger hearing that wild tattoo seized a dish and beat it furiously for a few moments, then, throwing the dish down, strode towards the Tiger Claim. They did not know what it meant; it might be murder committed, or gold-robbery, or the "jumping" of a claim—they would find out on arrival; all that was evident was the justice call had been sounded, and they went to see justice done.

"Illigant-lookin' lot av stiffs," commented Ginger. "Be gosh, Oi'm glad ut's good news we've got f'r 'em, they're comin' on like th' Anzacs did whin they bruk th' German Guards, Snowey."

"They *are* th' Anzacs, kid: perhaps they didn't go to the war; lots o' them that didn't go or couldn't go were as good as th' best that went."

In silence the crowd swarmed round the Tiger group, hemming them in, as grim and dour a throng as daylight ever shone down upon. There was no jesting, no horseplay: a "roll up" that called diggers away from gold was a serious thing.

McGlusky seized the crucial moment; then his voice broke out, vibrant, dominant, all-compelling—

"Men o' th' wilderness, A've a word for y'r lugs. A'm na orator, na heart-string twister, just yin o' yersel's—a digger." He had that stormy crowd in a grip like a vice with those few rugged sentences. Then: "Ma name's McGlusky: ma mates an' masel' ha' struck gold in th' cement below th' gold-bearin' clay; it was no' bedrock, but a false bottom, an'—it's rich. Look!"

He held aloft the chunk of cement he had given Ginger: the sunlight made the gold sparkle. All eyes were fastened upon it. There was a moment of magnetic silence, then a shout went up that sounded like waves crashing on a coast line.

"McGlusky—McGlusky—McGlusky! Three cheers for th' Tiger crowd."

Suddenly the veteran wheeled round, seized Ginger by the hips and held him high over his head.

"This is th' wean who found the gold; this is the gold-bug."

Another roar went up, and all pressed round to grip hands with the Tiger crowd, and Ginger borrowed fags until his shirt was well-nigh full.

Whilst the diggers were examining the new find, the Sergeant slipped away and came back with the veteran's horse ready saddled.

"I think you ought to take the good news along the Big Valley too, Mac," he said simply, "or some poor devil may sell his claim out, not knowing what he's selling."

"Good f'r ye, Sergeant; A'd clean forgot the Big Valley."

He wanted them all to go with him, but they bade him waste no time.

"A'll gae on ma lonesome, then, an' gie th' gommerils a good cry."

He took the lump of gold-bearing cement, and rode away at a flying gallop, a messenger of glad tidings with joy and pride bubbling in his heart. "Gie 'em a cry" he did, and his cry set the whole field crazy with delight.

He had put a chunk of cement as big as his fist, richly studded with gold, in his jacket pocket, and after he had finished his ride down Big Valley, he pulled bridle in front of The Kangaroo and Emu Saloon, and whilst the crowd examined the lump of ore that he had carried in front of him on the pommel of his saddle, he quietly drew the dark-eyed little barmaid whom Ginger had sung *The Bright May Morn* and other songs to on one side, and thrust the nugget he had carried in his pocket into her hand.

The pretty little thing was flustered with delight, and looked at him coquettishly.

"Oh, Mr. McGlusky, I — I didn't know — I never dreamt you thought about me at all."

"An' ye thocht richt, ma lass; A wadna ha kenned the differ between y'r face and a door-knocker masel'; th' bit gold is no' frae ma, it's a present frae ma laddie Ginger. Y're ta get a gold cigarette-case made out o' it in place o' th' siller yin ye gied him."

The girl crowed with delight.

"The darling, to think of me on the very first day of his luck." She held her pretty face up to his cast-copper visage, and her lips were like rosebuds breaking into bloom. "Won't you take something back to him from me, Mr. McGlusky?"

He put his hand under her chin and tilted her face far back.

"Hoots an' awa', lassie, but y'r mouth looks sweet enough to mak' a sober man theenk drunken thochts; na one ta look at y'r lips wad theenk tha's th' place ye bury y'r hash in. Na, na, A'll no' tak' anything back ta th' laddie; let him dae his ain collectin'; a cherry tha' needs twa ta bite it must be bitter ta yin an' sweet ta th' ither."

The crowd of diggers had left the Tiger Claim. The Sergeant had strolled away with Maida Lamarde. Butterfly was watering the horses, and Ginger, looking strangely unhappy for such an occasion, was sitting in a patch of salt-bush, fondling the ears of Maida's stag-hound. Snowey strolled over to the dejected figure.

"Somethin' bitin' you, kid?"

"Bitin' me, Snowey? No, nothin' would; Oi'm too blinkin' mean."

The Sharpshooter spread himself out on the ground; lying on his back he smoked, his hands clasped under his head.

"Oi've half a mind ter saddle me horse an' ride away on me lonesome, matey—f'r good."

"Bad as that, son? Well, if you've any blossoms o' truth you'd like ter strew around, son, why, strew 'em."

"T-r-u-t-h."

The one word broke from the imp's lips with a poignancy unusual in him.

"Been lyin'—extra—ter th' little bit o' fluff at Th' Kangaroo an' Emu, eh?"

"Och, thim! Oi wudden't go into mournin' over lies like them, Snowey; if we tell th' girls lies, they shoot a fair share into us; most girls can give a chap a lap in a mile an' a bad batin' at fairy-tale tellin'. This —this—och, ut's different."

"I ain't a padre an' can't give you absolution, an' I ain't a gramophone an' don't repeat what I hear. If you feel like it, an' think I can help any, why, let it bubble out; if not, bite on it."

"Yez remember me drame, Snowey? Th' wan Oi told th' Auld Timer Oi had five times?"

"Th' gold dream, kid?"

"Yes."

"Shore thing I do. Was you sleepin' with y'r head hangin' down when it came to you? I'm goin' ter sleep that way if you was."

"Snowey——"

"Yep."

"Ut wasn't a—a drame at all at all, ut was a blinkin' lie."

Snowey smoked his fag right out. Then—

"What made you do it?"

"Oi dunno; it just came ter me, an' flopped right out; Oi didn't plan ter fool th' Auld Timer; he was talkin' of packin' up an' quittin' th' claim, an' somethin' inside av me jumped, an' Oi'd told him th' lie about th' drame before Oi cud stop me tongue, an' afther that Oi cudden't ate me words, an'—an' Oi'm a liar an' th' truth ain't in me."

"You shore are."

"Oi'll tell him before Oi slape; Oi can't bear his praisin' me. Oi—Oi near blurted ut out when he lifted me up to th' admirin' crowd. Oi'll tell him ter-night."

"Ginger——"

"What is ut?"

"If you tell him to-night, or any other old night, an' I'm around, I'll leave about as much life in you as will last while an egg boils—that's all."

"Why?"

"Because he thinks some of his spirit friends planted that dream under your red hair, an' he's happy; you let him keep happy, that's all."

Snowey rose and went back to camp, and met McGlusky riding in.

"Where's ma wee laddie, Snowey?"

"Havin' a sleep out in the salt-bush, Mac; don't wake him; th' excitement of to-day has sort o' wore him out."

"A won't. He's a wunnerfu' laddie, richt wunnerfu' —a bit o' a de'il in some things, but he ha' great gifts."

"Yes," answered the Sharpshooter ruminatively, "he shore has."

The gold strike in cement set the whole field on a new basis, for it was found that the precious metal lay rich in all directions; men became wealthy in the course of a single week on many of the claims, and as is so often the case, lots of them played the maniac part of the beggar on horseback. Soon there were plenty of sharps to help the improvident gang play the fool; gaming-hells sprang up like mushrooms in a sheep-paddock after rain; foreign syndicates of the most degraded type of men imported batches of very handsome women, whose avocation was not an exemplification of the moral code. A new highway came into existence behind Republic Highway, which was styled the Boulevard de Lyndsie. Rows of gaudily decorated cottages were erected here, and the denizens for the most part were dames of doubtful industry, but undoubted beauty. They came from many quarters of the globe, those dames (?); superbly frocked and glittering with jewels that in many cases were as questionable

as the morality of their wearers, they looked strangely out of place amid the dust and grime of a new mining camp. Vienna, Paris, Petrograd, Tokio and many another city East and West had been scoured for these social outcasts, who had little but their beauty to recommend them. All night long pianos strummed incessantly, and champagne corks popped in the Boulevard de Lyndsie. Roulette wheels whirled and dice rattled, and more packs of cards came and went in a month than many a big city sees in a year. Chinese laundries sprang into being; hotels were run up, regardless of expense; shops made mainly of galvanised iron with plate-glass windows, displayed jewellery of fabulous costliness; boot and shoe and clothing stores exposed to view silks, satins, laces, furs and footwear fit for London, New York, Paris, or any other place where wealth and fashion abound; men who a month or two before scarce knew the luxury of a second shirt, arrayed themselves in purple and fine linen, and purchased outfits for drabs that princesses might have envied. A racecourse was marked out, and horses ran for great stakes on a track as hard as iron. Cricket, that fetish of Australian manhood, had swarms of followers; wickets made of coco-nut matting in lieu of grass were much *en évidence*. An enterprising Scotchman laid out a golf course, and he did not have to invent any artificial bunkers; where the "greens" should have been, but were not, he had the harsh brown earth broomed level and covered with felt, and black children of the sun-burnt soil, who a little while before had been running wild, were pressed in as caddies. When McGlusky first set eyes on one of these impromptu caddies carrying a bag of clubs, he exclaimed—

"By St. Andrew, Snowey, luk at yon pagan wi' th' clubs, there's naething between his nakedness an' th' sun but his smile." Then, turning to the Scot who had laid out the links, he said: "Mon, ha' ye no respec' f'r th' decencies? Eef ye've na claes f'r yon black buckie, can ye no' paint white buttons doon th' front o' his hide, ta mak' him luk as eef he was wearin' a jacket?"

"Dinna fash," replied the Scot, "they'll be a'richt soon; A'm gie'in' them a cap apiece, each cap a different colour, ta lichten up the scenery a wee bittie."

"Weel, weel, A'm no grumblin', ye ken, gie them their caps, an' paint on th' white buttons, an' they'll dae."

There was no more popular figure on the whole field than McGlusky; that speech of his to the crowd after he had struck gold in cement, and his dashing ride down the big valley to spread the news, had put the seal upon his fame. He joined in all the fun of the field, he even took a hand at cricket, but only appeared in a match once; on that occasion a fast bowler who at his zenith had played in an Australian eleven, made the ball bump so badly on the coco-nut matting wicket that Mac got bruised all over. After the third blow with the ball, he strode down the pitch, and remarked to the bowler—

"Man, air ye shyin' at ma, or th' wicket? Gin ye hit me again wi' th' ball, A'll whang ye ower th' lugs wi' th' bat."

A little later, a fast one greatly overpitched took him in the stomach. When he got up, some one had removed his bat out of reach; carefully pulling up a stump, he went forward to interview the bowler, remarking—

"A'd tak shame ta masel' eef A stood oop ta be shied at an' didna gie as good as A got." But the bowler had business elsewhere, and Mac retired from cricket confiding to the Sergeant that he was "no bad at throwin' bombs" himself, but he'd be "dommed" if he thought much "o' it as a pastime."

It was the Sergeant and Snowey who gave the old digger one of the most joyous surprises of his life. When the race club came into being, the two chums held a conference, and then Snowey announced that he was homesick, he wanted to go down to the coast and see his mother.

"A thocht ye told ma at Gallipoli tha' y'r minnie were dead, laddie?"

"I may ha' done," drawled the imperturbable voice of the Sharpshooter. "It's my stepmother I'm going ter see now, she's th' nearest thing in th' way o' mothers I've got."

Which caused Ginger to remark when he got the Sharpshooter to himself—

"Och, Snowey, Oi'm not th' only wan in th' Tiger Camp that can distend th' truth—you and y'r step-mother."

When Snowey returned from the coast, he brought a couple of horses with him, which he put into the capable hands of Phil O'Reilly, a horse-trainer whom he had known before the war.

No sooner did the clever trainer run his eyes over the horses than he laughed gleefully.

"Somethin' ticklin' you, Phil?"

"You've been burnin' money, Snowey."

"Why?"

"Couldn't have got those horses unless you did. I

know 'em both; the colt is King Bolt—races like a hare and jumps like a buck."

"You shore seem ter size him up, Phil."

"I ought to, I rode him twice over the sticks and won in a canter both times."

"Well," replied Snowey meekly, "th' mare's a bit of a rockin' horse."

Again O'Reilly laughed.

"You know better than that; you've ridden yourself too often as an amateur—a nice amateur you were too, Snowey—that mare is The Swallow; no one knows what she can do from five furlongs to a mile an' a half."

"Well, Phil, if you're satisfied, I ought ter be—seems I've stumbled on somethin' good f'r once."

O'Reilly, retired jockey and present trainer, cleverest and straightest of all the back-country brigade of horsemen, let one eyelid droop.

"Stumbled on 'em by accident, did you? I'd like to see the butt of your cheque-book, Snowey." Then, after another look at the horses: "They're both pretty fit now, all I'll have to do is to keep 'em fit. Goin' to race 'em in your own name, eh?"

Snowey looked at the Sergeant, who had been standing quietly by all the time, and the Englishman answered the look by saying—

"No, you enter the colt for the hurdles and the mare for the cup, in the name of James de McGlusky."

"It's our surprise packet for th' Old Sport," explained Snowey.

"It'll be a surprise packet for a lot of other people too," grinned the trainer. "A lot of the clever division have brought up horses for thoes two races, and

are ringing 'em in under all sorts of names and pedigrees. I saw Storm Cloud come in a week ago, carryin' a prospector's pack—guess they only put it on him a mile out of town."

"Sure it was Storm Cloud, Phil?"

"I ought to be, I rode him five times—wonderful jumper, but he can't pace with King Bolt over any distance."

"Seen any other horses you know, Phil?"

"Lots. The Clown's here, entered town pulling a light buckboard alongside another horse. They'll back The Clown f'r the Cup to their shirts."

"I shore think The Swallow will keep The Clown movin', son."

"Give him a stone, an' turn round in the race, an' then beat him. If you want to make any money on your two horses, don't enter them till the last minute, an' lay against all comers, bar your own, before the nominations are made public. I'll never have the clothes off those two until then."

"Well, we're not out for money this time, Phil; th' Tiger Claims are lookin' after that end for us nicely, thank you; but we want the Old Sport to have a real bit o' joy-cake f'r once. All th' same, I'll shore go after th' clever division for a bit o' their surplus coin f'r th' fun o' seein' their faces at th' finish. Is Ike Moss here?"

"Yes; he and a chap called Rooney have brought up The Clown and Storm Cloud."

"Rooney! Phil, that's better'n good news from home. We'll land them twins, Ike Moss and Rooney; I've owed Ike a love-shake for a long time, and Rooney——" His strange eyes looked away into distance, and Phil understood.

"What about colours, Snowey?"

"Brought 'em with me, O'Reilly."

Carefully Snowey undid a parcel he had been nursing, and out rolled a lovely yellow-and-black silk jacket and cap.

"The Tiger's colours."

It was the voice of the Sergeant, deep with exultation.

"Only seem ter have forgotten one thing f'r a clean-cut scoop, Snowey."

"Give it a name, Phil."

"A boy to ride The Swallow."

"I counted on you, son."

"Can't be done," answered Phil ruefully. "I'll look round and see if I can pick up some one."

"Guess there will be plenty who can ride knocking the dust up in these regions, but not many I'd like to trust; they mostly belong to the clever crowd, but you may find a peach."

"Why not ride yourself, Snowey?"

"Too heavy f'r th' mare by a long chalk, Sergeant, but if we're stuck, I'll try a rattle over the sticks on King Bolt, his style suits me, races like the devil at his jumps, he does."

"It's over or break your neck with him," laughed Phil. "All the Bolt breed were like that—all you had to do was to sit 'em an' let 'em go, they'd do th' rest."

Butterfly and Ginger were let into the secret, and a more furious youth than Ginger it would have been hard to find.

"You an' y'r auld stepmother," he snarled at Snowey. "Y're a cat that kapes all th' crame ter yerself. Why cudden't me an' th' Yank be in ut?"

"I don't think you've been quite on the level with

me an' th' kid, you two," contributed Butterfly, "this treat o' yours will go right under th' old digger's armpit—he loves horses an' he loves racin'. You shore should ha' let us in on th' joy-floor."

"He's got a grand secret av his own: he's put that horse he rode on ter th' field in trainin', an' he's goin' ter ride ut himself in th' jumpin' race."

"Won't have an earthly."

"Why not?"

"A great hack, beat a race-horse ter blazes in th' bush, can jump too, but racin' over two miles is different, an' he's near fourteen stone in th' saddle."

"Be Mary, y're right, Snowey, in that, but ye were blinkin' well wrong ter lave me an' th' Yank out av th' present ter me auld man. Come on, lave 'em to ut, Butterfly, we'll spring wan on thim f'r this."

There was very little doing in the way of gaiety in Canvas Town that the Tiger crowd were not in. The Sergeant started a private theatrical company, and as there were several good professional actors on the fields who had turned gold-diggers, he made a great success of it. Butterfly was in constant demand as a *raconteur* at all kinds of gatherings, and his quaint humour and unbreakable good temper made him vastly popular. As for Ginger, he must have had a good stock of common sense behind all his freakishness, or his head would have been turned by the popularity he achieved. His singing and his gifts with nearly every kind of musical instrument, from a mouth organ to a grand piano, ensured him a warm welcome. Snowey was the one member of the Tiger crowd whose company was not sought; he seemed to hold men and women too at arm's length; always civil, never noisy or exuberant, he

somehow seemed to cast a chill over merry-makers, and without intending it, he began to drift apart and move alone. The Tiger Claims were all turning out rich supplies of gold; hired men were put on each claim, and the owners supervised the work. They had money to burn, and they burnt a good deal. At times the Sharpshooter put in a night at the gaming-rooms and gambled in a manner that set the whole camp chattering, yet taking one night with another, his weekly losses were not heavy, luck seemed to wait on him. Brannigan the gamester once remarked—

"Anzac Snowey is about as good a loser an' as cool a winner as I've run into up to date. Ever see a swan dive?" he added, appealing to his audience. "Well, I have; they dive an' come up again an' nary a feather in their outfit ruffled, an' that's Anzac Snowey when he's on th' gamble—I like him."

"He can afford to lose, an' lose heavy," interjected a lucky digger known as Magpie Kelly.

"So can you," snapped Brannigan, "but I'm durned if you've learned how ter do it gracefully. When you drop a packet, you moan like a fog-bell, an' when you win a pot you whoop th' roof off. He's not built like that; he'd stake his whole claim an' lose it, an' then stroll away an' shave, an' his hand wouldn't shake enough ter make him crack th' skin."

Canvas Town sized Snowey up much on the lines of Brannigan's speech, but he was let severely alone. He often went to the dance-halls, but for the most part he lounged apart, and seldom danced. At odd times a mood of movement would possess him, then he would dance, and the women he danced with at such periods would talk about it for weeks. Now and then he met

Annie Laurie. Sometimes he danced with her, sometimes he pleaded fatigue, but never if Rooney was round; if he saw Rooney move towards the girl, he invariably forestalled him, and did it in such a manner that men wondered Rooney did not quarrel, he was fast enough to make or accept a row with other men, but not with the Sharpshooter.

"Guess Rooney knows brimstone when he smells it," was Brannigan's remark after hearing some one speak of the pair; "and," he continued, "it'll be brimstone f'r one o' them if they ever do get goin'."

Maida Lamarde had kept away from the dance-halls after the night she had been hissed, but on some errand or another she was very frequently in Canvas Town, both by night and day, and she and Annie Laurie were very friendly, in spite of the fact that each guessed the other would have gone through purgatory for the same man.

At times another mood would get possession of Snowey; he would saddle up and go for long, lonely night-rides, no man knew where, no man knew why. Often on such occasions Snowey would meet Trooper Jim doing his dreary vigils in the saddle, and great good feeling sprang up between them. Once Trooper Jim asked—

"Did you fellows on the Tiger ever hear how hard you hit Rooney the day you struck the deep lead."

"No, but I ain't goin' into mournin' if we did."

"Thought you wouldn't. None of your crowd like him."

"We don't kill any fatted calf when he's round."

"So I've heard. Why don't you like him, Snowey?"

"Well, Jim, my mate Butterfly Brown answered that

same question this way: he said, 'I don't like him; when I was a kid I didn't like rattlers in th' grass, an' we shore had some to home, an' I extend th' same views ter Mister Rooney.' An', Jim, I go nap on Butterfly's sentiments, they fit me better'n patent-leather boots."

Trooper Jim ruminated over this for a while; then—

"Butterfly don't seem to me to be the sort to make a chap like Rooney sit up an' scare."

"Butterfly ain't a hog f'r trouble, that's a sure thing, Jim, but take this from me—an' I know—th' man that makes Butterfly start on trouble will pray f'r peace."

"That so? Well, he's a nice chap, that Yank. Now I'll tell you how your Tiger crowd hit Rooney where it hurts. About an hour before McGlusky rode into Big Valley with his cement nugget and the news of the strike, Rooney sold out his claims to Johnson, the storekeeper, for a song an' a suit o' clothes."

"Why?"

"Well, he'd put most of his dirt through an' did pretty well. Johnson had brought up a new-fangled machine and reckoned he'd put all the dust through again, and get a lot of fine gold, and when Rooney heard of you fellows on the Tiger striking it rich in cement, he was pretty near as sore as a man could be and live."

It was after one of those long, lonely rides that the Sergeant, who had waited up for him, said—

"Seen Maida Lamarde lately, Snowey?"

"Seen her at a distance, that's all. Why?"

"She's bought out the Crab-apple Restaurant, and got her mother up to manage it."

"Shouldn't have thought she'd want her mother to work at her time o' life: Maida's got lashin's o' money."

"Got me in a bit of a knot, Snowey, f'r Maida isn't mean."

"Not a mean streak in her, son."

"I went there to dinner to-night, and I got a shock, Snowey."

"What hit you?"

"You haven't forgotten that dog that was wounded the night Maida's father was shambled?"

"You bet I haven't. He was all shot up an' seemed ter me ter be paralysed in th' hind-quarters."

"So the poor brute was, and it's paralysed still."

"Has she brought it on to the field?"

"She has, and it's at the Crab-apple Restaurant. Maida has planted a big wickerwork armchair against the wall, full of soft cushions, and the dog lies on that, with its big unfathomable eyes fixed on the door all the time."

"Queer stunt that, eh?"

"Y-e-s; and, Snowey, that dog hasn't got a lot of love for Maida Lamarde."

"Sure thing; I noticed that at their old home. I'm not one o' th' impressionable sort, Sergeant, but them big, sad eyes seemed ter me ter be accusin' th' girl of—of not havin' played th' game."

"Gave me that sort of feelin' to-night, Snowey."

Ginger, who had come to the tent, put in his verdict: "Oi saw th' dog too, an' thim eyes av th' lovin' auld dog didn't seem ter be sayin' that ter me."

"What did they seem to say to you, kid?"

"Och, thin, they was dumb eloquence, thim eyes, an' they shouted ivery time they fell on th' girl, 'Guilty, ye ——, an' Oi'll prove ut yet.'"

"I think you're shore wrong, kid, but I do believe Maida's got something on her conscience connected with her father's death."

"I don't think she knows any more about it than I do," snapped the Sergeant.

CHAPTER XI

BUTTERFLY AND GINGER SCOOP THE POOL

Not one word did the friendly conspirators tell the old digger concerning the two horses secured for him; he went on watching the training of his hack for the hurdles in blissful ignorance of the fact that King Bolt, the crack hurdler, was his. Phil O'Reilly had a mouth that Snowey said couldn't be prised open with a crowbar, where a racing secret was concerned. When and how he worked those horses no man knew but himself and possibly Trooper Jim, who so often came home in the dawn. This much was certain, none of the boys Phil employed ever saw either King Bolt or The Swallow with their clothes off. Phil rode them himself, and religiously locked them away, each in its loose box, when he came back from exercising them, and he fed them and groomed them with his own hands, with a little occasional help from Snowey, and the Sergeant.

The Sharpshooter had commissioned a bookmaker of his acquaintance to lay against Rooney's horses even before the nominations were formally announced.

When at last the entries became public property, and McGlusky's name figured against King Bolt and The Swallow, a very happy little party lunched at the Crab-apple, and the beaming veteran was installed at the

head of the table in a private room, and it was there that the news was broken to him. Snowey was forced to do the speech-making, and he did not do it very brilliantly.

"We shore thought, Old Sportsman, you'd like to win th' Hurdles an' Cup, so I got a couple o' mokes, an' Phil O'Reilly is lookin' after them, an' "—he unfolded the Tiger colours as he spoke, and tossed them to Mac—"we all hope you'll see this jacket an' cap there or thereabouts at th' finish."

"Wha' ma' th' names o' the twa mokes be, Snowey?"

"King Bolt and The Swallow."

McGlusky gasped, for he knew the pedigree of every good horse before the Anzac public.

"Ma certie, buckie, but ye didna buy *them* in a fish-market."

He was good to look upon in that hour, with the mates who had followed him through so many scenes of peace and war around him.

"Y're jest fine," he said simply, and the knotted cords of his great throat swelled and his voice was husky. Then he laughed and removed the tension. "An' me trainin' ma hack, an' theenkin' ta ride th' beastie ma ainsel', because it is ta be a bush-meetin'."

"Lots of hot stuff will be stripped for this same meetin', Mac; Th' Clown is here, an' Storm Cloud, an' O'Reilly says he'll take his oath he can recognise Silver Arrow in a bright chestnut he's seen on th' track, though th' last time Silver Arrow raced he was a beautiful grey, an' he's now called Red Roger, an' has 'no performances' against his entry, an' those I've mentioned won't die o' loneliness f'r want o' th' same

sort o' company when they go into th' hands o' th' starter."

"It's gran', buckies, it's just gran'. Th' clever crowd will be hoist wi' a bomb o' their ain contrivin'."

"I shore think they will; th' handicapper's a white man, and he knows th' game; a little bird whispered ter me that th' handicapper spotted Storm Cloud and The Clown, in spite of their assumed names an' th' alterations that had been made to their appearances, such as dyein' out white stockin's an' hoggin' manes an' dockin' tails. I gave your horses' names, pedigrees an' performances on th' dead level, an' I'm thinkin' virtue will have its own reward from th' handicapper. You'll get a fair packet o' weight, but you won't be crushed."

"A'm thanking ye, Snowey; A wad no' hae it otherwise. An', Snowey——"

"Yes?"

"A'm no' proud, ye ken, but A'm glad ye didna forget th' wee bit 'de' ta ma name." He read the paper in front of him: "The Chevalier Jamie de McGlusky's colt, King Bolt, and filly, The Swallow. Noo, who's goin' ta ride ma horses? They'll be carryin' a lot o' public money on th' day; we must no' be at th' marcy o' a wee waster wi' han's tha' can break a bridle, an' na mair sense o' sportmanship than a pig has o' th' laws o' property. Wha' about O'Reilly? He's clever an' game, an' he's straight as th' line o' a bee ta its hive."

"Can't get Phil, Old Timer."

"Och, an' what's wrong wid Snowey f'r th' jumpin' race, sorr?"

"A've always said ye were no' fit f'r an eediot asylum,

wee buckie. Ye've settled it in one shot. Na ither yin shall carry Jamie de McGlusky's colours ta victory."

"I'll shore do my best ter give you a run f'r y'r money, Mac."

"Cut ut out," growled Ginger, "don't go blushin' yerself ter death wid modesty, ut's—ut's not natural."

"Who's ta ride ma mare The Swallow in th' Cup?"

"I can't," said Snowey, "I can't do the weight."

"I'm afraid we're up against trouble there."

It was the Sergeant speaking, and he looked worried.

"Canna Phil pick up a boy he knows?"

"He has, Mac, but he told me to-day he'd had th' boy watched, an' he's almighty thick with Ike Moss."

"I know Ike, he's too crokked to lie straight in bed."

"Weel, Snowey, ef th' blastie 'pulls' ma mare in th' race f'r th' cup, A'll tweest him an' Ike Moss thegither like a piece o' knotted string. A'll ha' no stain on th' name o' Jamie de McGlusky."

Ginger rose from the table, and beckoning to Butterfly Brown, prepared to quit the room.

"Off, kid?"

"Oi am, Snowey."

"Somethin' pressin', eh?"

"Och no, Snowey, me an' Butterfly are only goin' ter try an' find a lovin' stepmother we—we mislaid."

"Still sore, son, eh?"

But Ginger tilted his nose in the air, and he and Butterfly, as Ginger put it, removed themselves "wid dignity."

Outside the Crab-apple the Yankee demanded a reason for their departure.

"Are you hatchin' ideas, son, or harbourin' th' hatchet o' ill-will?"

"Oi've got an idea, you've got ter hatch it, Yank."

"Well," grinned the big, good-humoured American, "I'm shore some strong on actin' as an incubator f'r th' ideas o' genius. What d'you want me ter hatch, a—a horse or somethin' ter ride one?"

"Come f'r a walk out o' town, and I'll enlarge y'r understandin'. Oi think Snowey an' th' Sergeant's stumped. Phil told me he didn't think he could get a lad up here he cud trust, not one worth a bite out av a ration-biscuit—an' he said The Swallow wants some ridin'. Come out av ut, an' get adjacent ter Nature."

Maida Lamarde and Annie Laurie were in the big public room of the Crab-apple when McGlusky and the other two mates came from the private room. Snowey greeted the two girls in his usual off-hand *nonchalant* manner. The Sergeant was cool and self-possessed, but there was a strange, pained expression in his eyes. The girls were both too strong by nature to let their feelings appear on the surface. Annie Laurie, always quick and full of resource, gave the veteran digger a merry smile.

"So you've been springing surprises on the sporting public, Mr. McGlusky?"

Mac threw his hands out dramatically in the direction of the two comrades.

"Blame them, ma lassie."

They stood chatting over the incident, and the girls were admiring the racing colours, when the dog in the chair by the door emitted a hoarse, menacing roar, and vainly tried to struggle off its cushions, every fang

bared, ready for action. It was a pitiful, yet terrible sight. The brute could only lift its head, and balance the front of its big body on its forepaws.

In the doorway stood Rooney looking straight at the glaring, growling dog, his handsome face distorted by an expression that seemed to match that of the hound. Ike Moss was beside Rooney, but the dog never gave him a glance; in impotent fury it glared at the other man, whose right hand had slipped down to his gun.

The little group of watchers stood spellbound by the scene for quite a long time, then with a swift movement Maida Lamarde passed from their midst and faced Rooney, and as she did so, Snowey lounged to one side so that the girl was not in a direct line between him and Rooney, and his hand was on a revolver butt also. His expression had not changed; only his eyes had taken on a queer lifelessness. There was nothing dramatic about Snowey's pose; every limb was loose and easy. Not ten feet away from him was a man whom from the first he had hated with a strange, unceasing hate, and that man a noted gun man from the Texan border, unless Trooper Jim's information was at fault. Never did gun man have a better mark than the slender figure of the ex-Anzac Sharpshooter made, with the white wall of the dining-room behind him to set off his form.

For an instant Rooney gazed into the boyish-looking face, and in that instant Annie Laurie instinctively wrung her hands. Rooney's eyes blazed with the instinct to kill, but the fire died out of his eyes, and something that might have been called a smile twisted Snowey's lips out of their habitual stern repose.

It was Maida Lamarde who spoke—

"Mr. Rooney, where and when did my father's dog ever see you before?"

The girl had extended one arm, her index finger pointed straight at the face of the frantic brute.

So they stood, a tense, highly-strung crowd; nothing was heard but a deep rumbling growl from the maimed brute.

Then Rooney made himself master of the situation. He lifted his hand from his gun, swept his broad-brimmed hat off in mockery, and answered the girl—

"I was just studying that interesting brute you describe as your father's dog, Miss Maida—never saw it before in my life, and, pardon me for saying so, it's hardly the kind of animal to keep in a business establishment, is it?"

He smiled as he spoke, the perfectly confident smile of a man who felt himself master of his surroundings.

"The dog has seen you before and recognises you."

"Really? I beg leave to doubt it."

As he spoke, Rooney fixed his gaze on the eyes of the brute, and walked carelessly forward, and stood so close that he could have touched the animal's head with his hand, and there he stood smiling.

A quiet, drawling, easy voice broke the silence.

"Game, Mr. Rooney—dead game—in front of a paralytic."

Only a few feet separated Snowey from Rooney as he let his taunt drift out slowly in measured cadences. Again the light of the killer was in Rooney's eyes, and again it died away. He looked pointedly from Snowey to McGlusky and the Sergeant.

"You are three to one."

"Ride out to One Tree Hill, and I'll make it one to one, Mr. R-o-o-n-e-y."

The man stood pondering deeply for a good minute, then—

"All right," he said, "be there at noon the day after the races."

"The day after, or the day before, or now—any old time will suit me. Mr.—Rooney, or shall I say Mr. Le Blanc?"

If Snowey had expected to draw his man by the utterance of the other name, he failed, for Rooney curled his lip in a sneer and answered—

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

"Sae wad a skunk."

The interruption came sharp and sudden from McGlusky. He drew his raw-boned figure to its full height.

"Rooney or Le Blanc, yon dog ha' gie'd his judgment ag'in ye; noo hear a man's. Old Joe Lamarde, yon lassie's father, were done ta death, there lies th' only witness, an' as God leeves. A theenk y'r han's air red wi' innocent blood; yon dog ha' shown his teeth ta na ither man but y'r ainsel'."

"Rather scant evidence to go to a jury with, my uncouth friend, but if you think it will save your mate from a meeting with me at One Tree Hill the day after the races, why by all means try it."

"Will ye gang wi' ma—noo?"

"No, one tryst at a time."

"Oot an' awa', ye cluckin' hen wi' a cock-bird's feathers; ye'll no' dare face him in fair fecht; twice th' day ye've shown th' white feather; ye ha' th'

desire ta kill, but no' th' spunk ta tak' a fechtin' chance. Ye've kep' weel oot o' ma way ever since A cam' ta camp—keep oot o' it fra noo on, or A'll tweest y'r innards an' spin ye wi' 'em like a wean spins a top."

"You ought to have been a poet, sir, you would out-Homer Homer."

So saying, Rooney sauntered out of the Crab-apple, and joined Ike Moss, who had been awaiting him at a discreet distance on the side-walk.

"That damned dog—I thought it was dead long ago," was all Rooney said, but Ike cursed all dogs ancient and modern.

As the day appointed for the race-meeting drew near, the excitement grew intense; every one knew or guessed that a number of good horses had been "rung in" under false names and fictitious pedigrees, and the diggers spent money freely in the hope of finding out the real "pea," for the claims on the deep lead were turning out gold in quantities that made all previous fields seem cheap; the precious metal was in evidence everywhere and some of the cement claims looked like veritable jewellers' shops. Cassidy's "Golden Hole" held the pride of place for a little time, only to be supplanted by "Brophy's Nest o' Nuggets," which in turn was outshone by "McPhee's Bed o' Sovereigns," "The Bank of England," "The Scottish Mint," and many another gorgeously rich show. The two banks in Canvas Town were simply gorged with raw gold, and once a week a coach drawn by six fine horses and surrounded by an armed escort of stern-faced troopers, carried a precious freight to the rail-head, to be entrained to the coast.

When the weights came out for the Hurdles and the Cup, it was found that King Bolt had to carry eleven stone, which was not surprising considering his well-known quality and performances in good company, but The Swallow was in the Cup with only seven stone twelve.

"We can't complain," remarked O'Reilly to the Tiger group, who had met in council. "The Cup's a gift to us, if we can depend on the boy I've got; and the Hurdles, with Snowey in the saddle, ought to come our way, but," he added with a laugh, "Snowey will have to ride with his eyes wide open for trouble, there will be one or two lads riding in the Hurdles who will not stick at much if they have orders to bring a horse down."

"I shall get up late that day, so's not to be caught asleep in th' saddle," cooed the Sharpshooter. "I know th' chap who rides for Ike Moss and Co., he's hot stuff. All the same I've got one on him, for King Bolt has the legs of th' field, an' he'll use 'em as soon as we start."

"Snowey'll deliver th' goods all right, an' if th' firm o' Ike Moss and Co. don't go into liquidation after th' races, don't call me Butterfly any more, call me Caterpillar Brown, an' a caterpillar with magenta spots on it."

"Been backing King Bolt, eh, Yank?"

"I've shore been backing you, Snowey; my little deposit at th' bank will be some attenuated if your quadruped ain't fired with high ambitions that day."

"A'm na worryin' aboot Snowey, it's th' wee de'il wha' wull ride Th' Swallow tha' mak's ma tobacco taste bad."

Ginger looked across at Butterfly and winked, and the American thrust his hands deep down in his breeches pockets, chewed his cigar and generally conducted himself like a successful manipulator after a magnificent coup.

"What blinkin' tragedy have you two dug up from some one's potato patch?" queried Snowey.

Ginger only whistled, and Butterfly bit on his cigar, to the irritation of the veteran.

"Ginger," he growled, "when ye try ta look like a meestery ye dinna dae yersel' justice, ye look like naething sae mooch as a walkin' advertisement f'r a hame f'r th' ha'f-witted th' noo; A've seen a ham look mair intellectual."

"Compliments don't disturb me, sorr."

"Shoe-leather wull, ye limb o' Satan, eef ye sit grinnin' at ma any mair. Wha' ha' ye been at?"

"Is ut meself y're meanin', sorr? Thin Oi've been backin' Th' Swallow. Oi've plugged every bookmaker an' 'tote' shop in Canvas Town. Butterfly sez his bank balance will look consumptive if King Bolt loses, an' me own—well, sorr, mine will want crutches ter walk wid if Th' Swallow don't bag th' Cup."

"Are you going it blind, kid, or have you somethin' special under that red thatch?"

"Somethin' special, Snowey? Me? No, only Oi had a long lovin' letter from me stepmother all about swallows, that's all."

With the air of two princes of the turf, the Yankee and the Irish lad linked arms and swaggered off.

"Wha' does th' de'il's buckie mean by it ava?"

"Dunno, Mac."

"I think," smiled the Sergeant, "we can trust that pair to keep their end up; when they plan a thing together, you've got to do some pushin' to get behind their lines. They'll tell us when they're ready."

"You're on it, Sergeant. Let 'em alone, Mac, and don't worry. Now I'm goin' ter sleep every night in th' loose box with King Bolt till I ride him in the race."

The Sergeant looked straight at Snowey.

"What for, mate? Can't you trust me?"

"I shore don't catch your meanin', Sergeant."

"Well, I've been sleepin' in King Bolt's loose box for a good while past, and O'Reilly has never slept out of The Swallow's stable since he had her."

"You score, partner." Then, with his whimsical twist of the lips, he added: "'Th' Englishman has put it across us, Mac—got there first."

"Weel, he has, an' he hasna. A kenned he were there, him an' Binkie, Maida Lamarde's bull-bitch. A went round yin nicht ta ha' a keek, an' Binkie didna act like a lady ta ma; A'm verra fond o' dogs, but no' when they supply themsel's th' way Binkie did tha' nicht—it's a marcy A've no' ta ride in th' races."

Out of pure impishness, and from a desire to punish Snowey and the Sergeant for not permitting him and Butterfly to share the present of the horses to McGlusky, Ginger refused to ease the discomfort of his comrades concerning his plan to upset Ikey Moss & Co. over the riding of the mare Swallow, until the day before the races. McGlusky was in a state of furious unrest, for O'Reilly had informed him that the boy engaged to ride the mare was beyond question in the pay of Moss.

"Better scratch the mare than let that boy ride for you, Mr. McGlusky."

"Canna we mak' it worth th' blastie's while to ride straight? A'll pay any price, f'r th' public money is on ma mare."

"The gang have some hold over the boy other than money, Mr. McGlusky."

Then Ginger and the American opened their surprise packet.

"That boy ain't goin' ter ride f'r you, sorr; me an' Butterfly have got a jock f'r yez."

"Who is it, kid?"

"Me auld stepmother's aunt, Snowey."

"You shore are a wasp when you're stung, kid."

"Well, you an' th' Sergeant bit me an' Ginger, an' we're only fulfillin' th' laws o' natural history by bitin' back, Snowey, but you can rest on th' downy pillow o' content ter-night, matey, you got th' mare an' we've got th' jockey to ride her, an' a smasher at that. Now, keep it as quiet as a first-class elopement before it gets in th' papers."

"Why?"

"Because we want Ikey Moss an' Co. to think they've got The Swallow in th' bag; we are goin' ter make a financial assault on all the 'double books' ter-night; they'll lay a good price about th' King Bolt–Swallow double f'r th' Hurdles an' th' Cup, because they shore think they've got one horse in the bag."

"Just one thing—tell me, does O'Reilly know of this?"

"By Mary, he does; Oi put ut to him as a racin' saycret an' him on his honour not ter tell."

"I thought Phil was takin' things mighty unconcerned these last three days. Does he know the jock?"

Ginger grinned his exasperating grin.

"Phil brought th' mare three miles out av town a few days ago, in th' opposite direction ter th' race course; we met him at dawn wid our jock."

"Get on with it."

"No wan saw th' gallop but Trooper Jim; he came up promiscuous, from nowhere in particular, an' he acted as starter. Phil was ridin' your hack, sorr, just f'r comp'ny f'r th' mare."

"Did O'Reilly know th' jock when he saw him ride?"

"He did not. He said: 'I know y'r face somewhere, but Oi can't place ye, but wherever ye sprung from, ye can ride.'"

"Wha's th' buckie's name, wee mannie?"

"Jim Sullivan, sorr."

"Has he got a licence, son?"

"He has, Snowey; Oi tuk it out f'r him meself—as an amateur."

"Where th' de'il did ye fin' him, laddie?"

"Lave that ter me an' Butterfly, sorr."

"I'll stake my astral existence, Old Sport, on two things; you'll have as good a rider on The Swallow as you'll have on King Bolt, an' as honest a trier."

"Man Butterfly, ye've added twa inches ta ma stature. Now gang y'r ways, an' plug th' double books f'r all y're worth, an' wha' ye dinna scoop oop, A'll tak'. A'm goin' on th' warpath wi' my chequebook, an' wha' ye leave A'll eat."

The race day came at last, and every man, woman and boy who could get there was on the ground. An air of reckless, devil-may-care gaiety pervaded the whole proceedings; the gay crowds surged round book-makers and Totalisators alike, and all did a roaring trade. The Sergeant stood all the time close to King Bolt in his stall on the course. Butterfly was closer than a shadow to The Swallow, and neither would allow any one to approach the horses, except O'Reilly, who moved close by all the time, with eyes that never left his charges.

At last the long-planned-for moment arrived. The Hurdles was the first race on the card. The ever-careful trainer gave the final touches to King Bolt's toilet. Snowey, wearing the Tiger colours, came out from the weighing-room, saddle on arm, McGlusky, proud as an emperor, striding on one side of him, Ginger on the other. Snowey put his saddle on, and the trainer tested girths and stirrups, and then McGlusky tossed Snowey lightly to his seat.

"A've gied th' public a gude man an' a gude horse, A can dae na mair. Y're both game, an', losh, y're both fit."

"Snowey darlint——"

"Anything particular?"

"Nothin', only me an' th' Auld Timer have plugged th' Totalisator ter th' neck wid King Bolt money."

"Good boy."

The other horses were filing out, and a corking good lot they looked, considering the pedigrees most of them boasted on their nomination papers.

"Like a word from me, Snowey?"

"Sure, Phil—drop it out gently."

"All the Bolt breed like to go away with a wet sail and take their jumps flyin'."

"Suits me too, Phil."

"Only one thing more—if I were up on King Bolt, I'd never let 'em crowd me to-day; they're ripe for mischief; a loose leg and a light heart, and let 'em catch us if they can would be my motto."

"Thanks."

Snowey swung King Bolt round, and just then Ikey Moss reached out a much-bejewelled hand to pat the horse's neck, remarking—

"Vy, he's fit to vin a fortune."

But his hand never reached King Bolt. A big, bony, almost fleshless fist, grasped Ike's wrist, and a voice growled—

"Ma horse is no' needin' y'r help, man, an' A'm no' needin' y'r comp'ny." McGlusky gave the bookmaker's arm a wrench that almost tore it from its socket. "Dinna come a-nigh a beastie o' mine agen th' day, or maybe A'll lay a han' on ye in anger."

When the Tiger colours appeared on the course a great cheer went up, for the diggers remembered how the man who owned those colours had played the game to them when he struck the deep lead, and many backed his horse out of sheer sentiment, though many put their money in other directions, not caring to trust it to an amateur rider.

There was a little finessing at the starting-gate, and Snowey soon picked the riders who were deputed to prevent him from winning; he recognised them by the way they manœuvred, but he made no sign. When the gate flew up King Bolt was in motion with the

first flight. Two seconds told Snowey his horse was full of racing, and he let him go. The conspirators in the race being professionals, had counted on having a soft thing in the amateur, but the first jump undeceived them, for Snowey took his horse at it with a rattle and skill that proved him no novice. Never had the great colt had a rider that suited him better; all that he asked for was to be let alone, and Snowey, who for months had been aching for just such a wild, headlong, reckless burst as this, sat still and gave King Bolt his own sweet way. The rider on Storm Cloud called to one of the conspirators to "Chase him and bump him."

"Chase him be damned!" was the sullen retort, "he'll bring all down that try to pace with him over the sticks; we're 'bit,' that's what's the matter with us."

When King Bolt had got over his first tremendous burst which had made a great gap between him and the field, he showed an inclination to yield to reason. Gently Snowey drew the horse within himself, and held him nicely together, but never dropping back, and King Bolt, galloping like a machine, and jumping as though he loved it, made hacks of his rivals, and the ovation the pair received when they came in, led by the steward of the course, was something to be remembered.

Then the crowd surged around the owner, and "McGlusky! McGlusky!" was the cry, and Snowey, his heart aflame with pride in the man he loved, forgot his sphinx-like calm in the veteran's hour of triumph, and standing in his stirrups, joined in the yell, but Rooney, looking into Ikey Moss's eyes, snarled—

"That settles it, I'm on the job to-night."

Butterfly, watching the tumultuous mob of diggers surging round the veteran, and hearkening to their deep-toned cheering, opened his soul to the Sergeant.

"Say, pardner, I thought these Anzac folk was noted f'r their soporiferous calm; this shore is somethin' ter write home ter mother about."

When McGlusky and the Sharpshooter at last got away from their admirers, they at once cornered Ginger and Butterfly.

"Noo, buckies, we've trustit ye ta th' hilt; where's ma jockey f'r The Swallow?"

Snowey dropped a kindly hand on Ginger's shoulder.

"Pull th' cork, kid, you've shore had th' bottle ter yerself long enough. Where's Jim Sullivan?"

"Over beyant, talkin' ter O'Reilly."

They looked, and saw a jockey ready dressed in all but the Tiger jacket, a dark-faced boy with close-cropped jet-black hair, and nice intelligent face.

"Looks good to me, son. Say, is he a half-caste?"

"Oi didn't ask him."

"Well, he looks like one—a good deal darker than a lot o' half-breeds I've seen."

"What's bitin' ye? He don't ride wid his complexion, does he?"

"He's got mair than a touch o' th' tar-brush in him, but A wad na care eef he were as black as ma boots, gin he can ride an' ride straight."

"O'Reilly's satisfied, sorr."

"Eef tha's sae, weel sae am A. Phil's a gran' judge o' a horse, an' a lad."

Just before the horses went out for the Cup, Annie Laurie came to have a look at The Swallow.

"Hope you've put a bit on the Tiger crowd's mare; we've got a good chance, you know, Annie."

This was Snowey's greeting.

The girl laughed.

"Put a bit on? My gracious, I should think I had. Ginger and Butterfly simply drove me gambling mad; they made me back King Bolt straight out, and The Swallow straight out also, and not content with that, they mesmerised me into backing the double. I shall simply be a bankrupt for life if The Swallow fails."

"Well, you've one leg in on King Bolt, an' I like your chance for both."

"She's not a pretty mare, but she's fit. Tell me, Snowey, are you sure of your jock?"

"Sure of nothin' on this planet, but Butterfly an' Ginger swear by th' boy Sullivan."

McGlusky just at that moment held out his hand; the jockey Sullivan put one diminutive foot into it, and went up like a feather. Then Snowey looked up into the swarthy face of the jockey as he was settling himself into the saddle. Annie Laurie's eyes followed Snowey's gaze. Jim Sullivan's face wore a frown of determination, his mouth was firmly locked, and he took the owner's final instructions with a curt and comprehensive nod.

"A'm trustin' ye, buckie, remem'er tha'. Y're but a wee body an' A canna hit ye eef ye play me false, but by ma sinfu' soul, gin ye dinna ride ta win, eef ye can, A'll yank ye oot o' th' saddle when ye come in an' lay ye across ma knee, an' A'll spank ye till tha' end is as tender as a spring chicken, but if y're beat fair, A'll no squeal, A'm no' tha' sort."

There was a gleam of white teeth as Jim Sullivan's lips parted in a smile at the old digger's grotesque threat. The smile faded instantly, but Annie Laurie caught a puzzled expression on Snowey's face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Can't quite make that half-caste jock out, he puzzles me some."

"Why?"

"Seem to know him, but can't place him. Does he remind you of any boy you've seen before, Annie?"

"No; you're developing nerves, Snowey."

"Perhaps I am. I'd hate to be beaten by some kid Ike Moss had planted on us, but we'll soon know." Then changing the subject abruptly, the Sharpshooter queried: "Seen Maida Lamarde to-day?"

"Yes, I was talking to her not long ago. Why?"

"Nothin' much, only I wondered I hadn't seen her."

"Want to see her very badly, eh?"

Do as she would, Annie Laurie could not keep a tremor out of her voice.

"Want to see you an' her both pretty bad to-night. I—well, I've got a business engagement to keep to-morrow."

"With Rooney at One Tree Hill. Snowey, Snowey, you're mad."

"Most of us are, more or less, but you an' Maida Lamarde dine with me to-night at the Crab-apple, eh?"

"Yes; I'll find Maida and arrange. But, Snowey, you're not going to One Tree Hill alone to-morrow? Rooney won't play straight."

"Guess I'll attend to that end, Annie."

The girl laid a quick, caressing hand on his sleeve.

"Trooper Jim shan't be far away from One Tree Hill to-morrow, Snowey."

"Have you told him?"

"No, but——"

"If you do tell him, Annie, you an' me say th' long good-bye to-night."

"Why, Snowey?"

"Why—I shore wouldn't sleep in th' same cemetery with a woman who made me look cheap ter such a man as Rooney."

"Won't you give up that meeting for—for my sake, Snowey?"

"No, dearie."

"Will you for—Maida Lamarde's sake?"

"No."

He swung round and followed the crowd that was trooping after the horses to the gate.

Annie Laurie, with agony in her woman's eyes, turned and confronted Ginger.

"Och, an' what's hurtin' ye, Annie? If th' mare loses Oi'll take over y'r bets, me an' th' Yank have arranged that."

"My bets?" Her lips curled; then she told him.

"You an' y'r fears," scoffed Ginger. "Do yez think a divil like Rooney cud put th' comether over the Tiger crowd?"

"Rooney won't play straight."

"Well," jeered Ginger, "do yez think it's meself that'll stand too much on what Butterfly Brown calls th' niceties av punctilio' wid a blayguard like Rooney, an' me mate's life in danger? Go away an' get y'r hair dyed blue."

"I—I could hug you, Ginger."

"Be Mary, an' Oi won't call th' p'leece if ye do, Annie, but moonlight suits me complexion best f'r thim gymnastics."

"Have you a plan, dear?"

"Me? No, th' Auld Timer does th' plannin' when th' Tiger crowd's in trouble, he's th' divil an' all on plans."

"Has McGlusky prepared for treachery?"

"He didn't call ut that; he said Rooney meant murder an' not fightin', an' he took th' three av us out ter One Tree Hill unbeknown ter Snowey, a' he selected places f'r us—wid our rifles: me on wan side, th' Sergeant on th' other, an' Butterfly adjacent. We'll slip out before daybreak an' lay low, an' wait, an' watch."

"Won't McGlusky be there too?"

Ginger gurgled his amusement. "Him? He's too timid; he'll be fillin' in th' scenery somewhere on Mister Rooney's line av march. There's some on-dacent eccentricities av nature upheavin' themselves f'r th' benefit av Mr. Rooney an' his gang."

"Won't Snowey object to your plan?"

"He wud, if he knew—but he won't. Th' Old Timer knew ut would be no good tryin' ter stop Snowey from goin' out ter-morrow, so he planned to stop Rooney."

"Snowey will miss you and grow suspicious."

"He won't. Oi'm goin' ter elope on a wild orgy av love wid th' little girl from Th' Kangaroo an' Emu, an' th' rest are goin' ter start in pursuit ter bring me back ter th' ways av—av misguided virtue."

"Ginger, you're a little beast."

"Och, ut's all play actin'—worse luck," sighed the imp.

They had strolled to the front of the grand stand as they talked, and the horses had walked to the post. Snowey and the rest of the Tiger crowd came and joined them.

When the horses got into the hands of the starter, there was a lot of jostling and pulling and hauling of certain animals. Snowey, with his glasses to his eyes, drawled—

"Jim Sullivan an' Th' Swallow are in for a rough house, Old Sportsman."

"Aye, tha's plain. Why does th' starter no' send those blighters back ta th' paddock? They've shown their hand."

"Search *me*," was the Sharpshooter's laconic answer.

"That accumulation o' sin an' slipperiness in th' crimson jacket near had our jock out o' th' saddle then."

This came from the American.

"Watch the boy on Troubadour, he's trying to swing his horse right on to The Swallow."

"Sure thing, Sergeant, an' Troubadour is a divil, he near always goes to th' post in a muzzle; his boy is trying to make him 'savage' th' mare."

"Well, one thing's sure now," cried the Sergeant, "our boy is not one of the gang; they wouldn't set about him like this if he was."

"I'll shore take some unparliamentary proceedin's with that same gang if they hurt our jock," snarled Butterfly, but Ginger growled—

"Thim an' their dirty tactics; you can lave our jock alone, he's got more nerve than that bunch, he's——"

"They're off."

The roar that all racegoers know heralded the start for the Cup, and before the horses had settled into their stride all the spectators realised that three out of the fifteen riders were out to bring The Swallow to grief. A big iron-grey horse bumped her so hard that she "changed her leg." Troubador cannoned into her, and a horse galloping just behind her, rushed forward and struck her on the quarter with his shoulder, and The Swallow's muzzle nearly touched the ground.

"They've got the gloves off all right."

This came from Snowey.

The Swallow dropped back, her rider nursed her and brought her along nicely, but came on the outside; when drawing for places at the start The Swallow's number had placed her right in the thick of the field, now the jock picked a spot where he could hope for a clear run.

"That kid's all right."

This dictum came from O'Reilly, as good a general as ever steered a racehorse to victory.

"He'll get na spankin' frae me, win or lose."

Annie Laurie laughed out clear as a bell-bird's melody at this saying of McGlusky.

"Did you promise your jockey a—a spanking, sir?"

"A did."

Again the girl's sweet mirth pealed forth. The veteran spoke to her gruffly—

"Air ye lauchin' ta ease y'r feelin's, or ta gie y'r top note an airin', or ta gie yon newspaper buckie wi' th' camera a pictur' o' a daft wumman f'r his fule paper?"

The crowd became very still. The horses were turning into the straight, The Swallow a little in the rear, well on the outside.

"Hoo dae ye tak' it th' noo, Phil?"

"It's all over, bar shoutin', if they haven't bumped all the running out of our mare, sir; she's of the Malua strain: she'll come like a flash past her horses if Sullivan does as I told him, an' nurses her to the half-distance. By thunder, what's that?"

A chestnut racing on the outside of the ruck had shot across the course towards The Swallow.

"Goin' to carry our mare clean off th' track, damn him."

"That chap on the chestnut knows all about The Swallow's finishing run, Snowey."

This came from the trainer. The Swallow's rider did not move on the mare until the chestnut was almost alongside, then crouching far over the mare's neck, he made a call, and The Swallow, true to her name, shot forward with a tremendous burst of speed, hurtling past the baffled scoundrel on the chestnut, on past the field, and on without faltering past the post, as her great-great-grandsire Malua had done on many a hard-fought field.

The crowd went mad. Men who had lost their money joined with those who had won; hats went into the air; the diggers' yell, the stockmen's coo-ee, long-drawn and piercing, joined with shouts of those who had learned the battle-cry of Anzac on sterner fields.

They cheered the mare, they cheered her rider, and they cheered McGlusky; and Trooper Jim and his uniformed mates had to make a cordon round the

three knaves who had ridden so foully, and even at that they did not escape scatheless.

When Jim Sullivan had passed the test of the scales, and the mare's number went up as a signal of victory, McGlusky caught Jim Sullivan up in his arms, and holding him like a babe said—

"Ye wee mite o' a man, ye've th' heart o' a leeon. A threatened ye wi' a spankin'; noo eef it were no' a shame to dae it, A'd—A'd kiss ye."

Then the veteran digger got the surprise of his life, for the nearly black face came close to his own, and a voice he knew whispered in his ear—

"I'll—I'll sue you for breach of promise if you do, Mr. McGlusky, and call this crowd as my witnesses."

"Och, y're stung, sorr, an' Snowey an' th' Sergeant's stung too, sorr. Ut's me an' th' Butterfly that's got th' jaynius—but don't give th' show away, let Maida get into girls' dress an' wash th' black dye from her face an' hands first."

Maida was smiling into Annie Laurie's eyes, as McGlusky turned to them.

"Ye ken her, Annie?"

"I knew all along; I dyed her face, and cut her pretty golden hair off, and made it black."

"Wha' for, lassie, for why should ye dae it?"

Annie Laurie's voice grew very wistful all of a sudden.

"Why, Mr. McGlusky, for the reason women have been doing things through all the ages—to help a man."

CHAPTER XII

ROONEY'S GRIM HAZARD

"KID——"

"Well, Snowey?"

"You shore dazzled us all to-day; what beats me is how you had the face to ask Maida ter ride f'r th' Tiger crowd."

"Oi didn't; Oi caught th' idea browsin' round in th' salt-bush, an' Oi put ut up ter Butterfly, an' he interjooced th' subject mixed up wid scientific reflections on th' name an' fame of McGlusky, ter Maida Lamarde, an' she bit on ut like—like Binkie bit McGlusky when he went prowlin' round Th' Swallow's stable. She jest rose to ut, matey. She an' Annie Laurie did the rest, an', Snowey——"

"Drop y'r pearls o' wisdom round, son."

"Oi'm beginnin' ter think Oi was wrong about Maida."

"Why?"

"Well, a girl who'd cut off that bunch av gold hair she had, just to help a man out wouldn't fill her father full of lead, wud she now?"

The Sharpshooter was saved the necessity of answering by the arrival of Maida herself, garbed once more in feminine apparel.

As Snowey shook hands with her, he said—

"I'm glad we won th' Cup, but we paid too tall a price f'r doin' it."

"What price?"

"Your lovely hair, and th' ruin of your complexion."

"Oh, my hair will grow again, and the dye will soon work off my face."

"I guess you fooled us all when you turned yourself into a mulatto; your skin was so fair."

"Well, I didn't know myself when I looked in the glass and saw my short hair as black as coal, and my face not much lighter, but when I got into jockey clothes, I had no fear at all that any one would recognise me; I looked all boy."

'You shore can ride."

"Yes, my father taught me; he owned a couple of up-country racers once, and I rode them in their work. What my Dad didn't know about horses wasn't worth going to law about. If I'd been a boy I should have been a jockey."

"Why did you take the name of Sullivan?"

"That was my mother's maiden name."

Annie Laurie entered the Crab-apple, and at once joined Maida.

"Did Phil O'Reilly know you were a girl?" questioned Annie.

"I don't know; it's hard to tell what Phil knows or doesn't know; if he had any suspicions, he never gave me a hint by word or look; his business was with the horses and he attended to that end."

"He shore is a whale f'r absorbin' information, an' a miser f'r partin' with it, nothin' leaks from Phil."

"Here he comes, an' the rest of the Tiger outfit too."

As soon as the happy party had assembled in the private room which Snowey had engaged, McGlusky approached Maida with his eyes twinkling.

"Are ye a wumman o' y'r word, Maida?"

"A good deal depends on the 'word,'" she laughed.

"Weel, on th' course ye half promised A micht kiss ye gin A caught ye in private."

"Well, I'll half keep it." The girl put her fingers to her lips, and threw him a kiss.

"A never cud abide a half-way hoose," chortled the veteran digger, and stooping his head swiftly, he kissed her. "A've won ma Cup, an' noo it's fu' ta th' brim," he cried gleefully, and thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a jewel-case and displayed a bracelet of exquisite workmanship and great value. "Th' jeweller buckie opposite is a Scot, an' a keen man o' business, so he opened his shop this evenin' after th' races, knowin' those who had won ter-day wad maist likely be free wi' their winnin's, sae A bought this f'r ye, lassie, ta remin' you o' The Swallow an' Th' Tiger crowd."

Maida's face was a study as she held out her hand, for she knew by this token she stood cleared from suspicion in the eyes of the group of strong men who had come into her life.

Whilst this joyous little scene was in progress, a band of half a dozen horsemen rode quietly down Republican Highway, wonderfully well-mounted men they were, too, and all of them riders. The Highway

was almost deserted, for all Canvas Town was either at dinner, or partaking liquid refreshment in the bars and saloons. A Chinaman with a long pole with a basket crammed full of fruit and vegetables balanced on his shoulder, trotted across the road just in front of the group of horsemen, and the leader swung himself half round in the saddle and said, with a laugh—

"That's a good omen, boys, a Chinaman brings luck."

"Hope you're right, Rooney; we're goin' ter need all th' luck that's comin' our way," came from a man riding close behind.

"Don't get cold feet, Wasmore, the stake we're playing for is worth the gamble."

"When my feet get cold there won't be much warmth in the rest o' my carcase," retorted the rider called Wasmore.

No one watching them would have suspected they had any desperate enterprise afoot; they neither sought to attract attention nor to avoid it. Scores of similar groups had passed earlier in the evening after the races. They looked like a bunch of well-to-do diggers making an early departure for their claims.

"There's the bank, right opposite the Crab-apple, and the gold is all made up in leather bags, ready for the escort to-morrow morning; there's only three clerks left inside the bank, they'll be armed, and they'll fight."

"You can bet your sweet life they will."

"All right, Ventry—so will we. Now, you all know your parts; Mickling will walk quietly to the door, no hurry, no fuss, as soon as we dismount; the rest will

group round him, so that no one in the street can see what he's doing; he'll slip his steel lever behind the bar padlocked across the door from the outside, and wrench it away; the bank people were cute enough to padlock the door from the outside as well as lock it from the inside, locked their own men in, so that if they were tempted, they couldn't loot without outside help."

"What about the inside lock?"

"Gallant will slip a tube of Giant Berlinese into the keyhole, and a couple more under the door, and set them going; that will bring down any door in Australia; it's the essence of the stuff the Germans used for their highest explosives—I imported it, and I have tested it."

"Make a blinkin' row, won't it?"

"Not much, that's one of its great qualities, but it will make some."

"Guess it will bring Trooper Jim."

"If it does, that's his funeral; we've got to shoot to kill, don't forget that. Now, if any one's got cold feet, let him drop out."

No one dropped out.

"Here we are; now easy, no rush and no flurry."

Rooney swung lazily from the saddle, slid his reins over the horse's head, and let them drop, a signal to the animal to stand. The others did the same. Rooney, standing in the middle of the footpath, very deliberately lit his pipe, whilst Mickling strolled to the door of the bank and inserted a steel spring lever of great power behind the bar that crossed the door. Each man, as he had dropped his reins on the ground, had slipped a

mask over his face. Grouped around Mickling, the gang might easily have been mistaken for a body of sportsmen chatting in the street over the day's racing. Mickling put his weight on the scientific instrument he was using, and the bar and padlock came away with a tearing sort of noise.

"Now—Gallant, in with the Berliner essence; that row will alarm the clerks."

Rooney gave his orders calmly but crisply. Gallant seemed to know his job. He placed the explosives with steady fingers.

"Get back."

He stepped to one side of the doorway as he gave his warning, and the rest fell away. Three reports followed in rapid succession, not very terrifying sounds, and few of the men drinking in the bars not so very far away heard the noise above the revelry, and if any did hear they took no notice. Rooney had planned for this, a quiet, ordinary night would not have suited him.

McGlusky was just clasping the bracelet on Maida Lamarde's wrist, when the highwaymen's explosions broke the sounds of revelry. It was very quiet in the secluded private dining-room at the moment, and all present heard the three detonations distinctly.

"Wha's yon?"

The old digger stood with the girl's hand in his, and his head screwed round in the direction the noise had come from.

"Ut sounded a bit like bombs ter meself, sorr."

"Shake a leg ta yon outside door, and see, wee mannie."

Ginger went quickly; the others looked one at the other, as if scenting something not quite right.

"Too muffled like f'r gun play, Old Sport."

"Tha's not."

The sharp report of a revolver had cut in on the conversation.

"Somethin' doin'."

No one answered this remark of Snowey's; all the Tiger party were pushing out quickly, but with a certain method born of military training. Men and women had sprung from their seats in the big dining-room of the Crab-apple. The Tiger bunch, with Annie Laurie and Maida Lamarde at their heels, met Ginger hustling his way back to them.

"Hell an' all ter pay at th' bank opposite, sorr," was his greeting.

"Stickin' up th' bank," cried Snowey.

"Ma goold's in there, ma brain sweat an' heart sweat."

Like a bull going through a plantation of saplings, the old digger went through the crowd, and his bunch went with him. The only connected sentence Snowey heard as he forced his passage came from the Yank, whose temper nothing seemed to influence.

"This'll make a nice epitaph f'r somebody's tombstone."

At the door of the Crab-apple, McGlusky came to grief. A man who bore a striking resemblance to Ikey Moss the bookmaker, had been lurking just by the entrance, and as the old digger charged forth, the loiterer thrust out a leg and McGlusky pitched forward on to his head.

Butterfly, who saw the episode, promptly drove his fist into the obstructor's face, remarking afterwards that "the guy who threw his laig around in that manner didn't oughter have laigs at all, but should perambulate on crutches."

The highwaymen had not wasted a moment after they had blown the bank-door in; they knew that they had no time to squander. Springing inside, Rooney found himself face to face with a youthful clerk.

"Hands up."

The clerk fired in reply to the order, and his bullet grazed Rooney's cheek.

Bang—bang went the robber leader's heavy guns, and the youth fell forward on his face.

Wasmore, Rooney's lieutenant, shot another clerk who had run in from an adjoining room. The third clerk, covered by half a dozen guns, threw his hands up.

"Now, out with the gold-sacks, quick; I'll go and stand by the horses and hold off any meddlers."

As Rooney spoke, he strode into the street, a big heavy gun in each hand, and two more swinging at his hips; he had come prepared for a fight, and the blood-lust was on him. A few seconds later two of the robbers came out of the bank with gold-sacks, and began to fasten them to their saddles. A fragment of something blown away by the explosions set fire to a big tent next door, and the rush of flame lit up the scene with magical speed, for in that fiercely hot climate all things were as dry as tinder and as inflammable.

Snowey was the first man within the circle of light. Rooney jerked his left arm forward from the hip, and fired. The bullet smashed into the Anzac Sharpshooter's

right shoulder, and spun him half round, and in that moment, so critical for Snowey, the Sergeant came into action. His first bullet brought Rooney to his knees, but he was up again in a second, but that second saved the life of Anzac Snowey.

The robbers were all near their horses now, none remained in the bank, and they were fighting with a hangman's noose round their necks, and knew it. The big crowd that had poured into the street at the sound of the firing, drew off, for nearly seventy per cent. of them were unarmed. All the robber guns were going at once. Ginger dropped, rose to his knees, and fired with savage determination to get his own back.

"Aim low, kid."

It was Snowey's voice above the din that reached the Irish lad's ears, and Ginger aimed low, and the robber named Gallant dropped on his back.

Butterfly Brown seemed to be juggling with his weapon, so swiftly did he fire.

On to the scene rushed Trooper Jim and two of his men, their dark blue uniforms making them conspicuous in the glare of the firelight. All the robbers with one accord opening on them. Brave old Trooper Jim, who had ridden the back country for so long and had kept order so fearlessly and well, staggered a little, halted, tried to lift his arm to fire, and toppled over. Another trooper stood swaying from side to side in a vain effort to keep his feet, and then sank all in a heap. The robbers, at Rooney's orders, had got behind their horses, and were firing across them. Suddenly a voice that had a thunderous roll in it, bellowed an order—

"Shoot th' horses through th' heads, buckies—shoot."

McGlusky had recovered from his stunning fall, and now his old gaunt figure flashed into view.

Ginger, who had been fighting on his knees, had sunk on to one hand, his sight growing dim as the blood dripped from his wounds, but that grim old warlock's voice brought the Irish spirit back; the lad lifted himself and fired, and an outlaw's horse plunged forward to its knees, and then stretched out on the roadway. Ginger emptied his gun into the body of another horse, and then, with a tired sigh, dropped the weapon, and lay with his red head pillowed on his arm. Annie Laurie saw him fall; she sprang to him and ripping a strip from a garment, was staunching the flow of blood, when a bullet hit her. The Sergeant, badly hit in more than one place himself, strode to the girl and tried to lift her, but his strength was too far spent; he let her down on the roadway, and stood in front of her firing at the gang who were now partly screened by the smoke and by the shadows from the bank building, as the fire died down—it had been too fierce to last long.

"Empty your guns into the old devil."

It was Rooney's voice, venting his hate of McGlusky.

"Coom oot an' fecht ma, ye murderin' dog."

A great cry boomed out from the crowd. Maida Lamarde, with a gun in each hand, had run forward; she fired at Rooney's horse behind which three men were standing, hoping to sell their worthless lives at a high price. Her aim was true, and the remnant of the robber gang stood revealed. The third trooper

dropped. Then McGlusky and Snowey tried to shield Maida Lamarde with their bodies, even as they fought.

"Leave Rooney to me, Old Sport."

"A'll tak' th' ither yins."

Rooney, as if accepting the duel, singled himself out. Snowey's pistol arm hung useless by his side, but he used the other hand, though he had to brace his legs wide apart to keep from falling, for as Butterfly afterwards explained: "Shore Snowey had enough lead in him ter start a plumber in business in a wet country." For the twinkling of an eye neither men fired; then the big Colts boomed, and spat their heavy slugs of lead. Rooney was as hard to kill as Snowey; he carried his lead with the vitality of a wild cat, but he dropped at last, snarling like a mad beast to the finish.

Only two men were left upon their legs—Snowey and McGlusky, and they were kept upright only by the indomitable spirits that were in them, by all the laws of nature both ought to have been down.

"Hurt bad, Snowey?"

Maida Lamarde's arms were round the pride of the old Anzac division, her voice in his ears.

"Most—got—my—ticket—little girl."

"You shan't go—I won't let you go."

His head that had grown as heavy as lead fell on her shoulder.

"Guess—I've—had—a—full—hand—an' played it, dear."

McGlusky was kneeling in the dust, with Ginger's head against his breast, and men pressing round who heard him sob, swore they would never forget it till

their dying day, and the scallywag prospector known as "The Possum," who had some good points in him, voiced the general sentiment when he said—

"Mates, it's blinkin' orful to be loved by a man as much as that."

In a tent not far from the scene of the tragedy, Rooney lay gasping his life out, and he went on the outward bound journey before dawn, to the regret of those who hoped to save him for the rope. He only spoke once, just as life was going, and his malice was as deep in death as in life.

"Tell Maida Lamarde I did her father in, and her lover the Anzac, too."

"Why?" asked the doctor.

"Old Joe Lamarde knew where oil was in the Barren Ranges, and he wouldn't tell me."

"How did you know Joe Lamarde struck oil?"

An all-evil smile lit the devilish handsome face of the dying sinner.

"His daughter told her half-sister—an' she told me, so in a way she murdered her father."

"Och, is ut winter or summer, or—or somethin' in between, sorr?"

"Hold y'r whisht, it's winter, wee mannie."

A long pause, and then—

"How long have Oi been lyin' here, sorr?"

"Four months."

"Where's—Snowey?"

There was dread in the young voice, fear in the beautiful eyes—fear for what the answer might be.

"He's dacin' fine; we got a gran' man oop frae th' ceety, a specialist, an' he dug a lead mine oot o' oor

laddie ; he's no' greatly hurtit ; 'm hopin' he'll be able ta walk wi'in a year. Noo sew y'r mouth oop."

"Oi will, if yez tell me about th' Sergeant an' Butterfly."

"They're no' playin' footba', but they're nearer ta it than yersel'." Then suddenly the old digger bent and kissed the ghastly white face on the pillow. "Mannie, A'll no' keep things fra ye—ye'll never sing again."

A look of bitter disappointment came into the boyish eyes, for his voice had been his one secret ambition, and McGlusky knew it, knew how he had hoped to win fame with it.

"Tell me, sorr."

"A bullet tuk ye in th' throat, laddie."

They sat in silence listening to the rain, then all that was Irish in the imp came to his aid.

"Sorr——"

"A'm hearkenin' ta ye, wee buckie."

"Be Mary, if Oi can't sing, Oi can whistle, sorr, an' Oi'll sit on Rooney's grave an' whistle th' *Rogue's March* ter cheer him, an' Oi hope he'll like ut."

In another private ward of the same hospital Snowey was sitting propped up in bed, a very worn and wan Snowey. Maida Lamarde was sitting by his bedside, for she had constituted herself his nurse from the first.

"Feeling stronger to-day, boy?"

"Feelin' fine, Maidee, it shore put new life into me when I heard Ginger had taken a twist f'r th' better."

The girl laughed, and there was a merry lilt in her mirth.

"What a funny crowd the Tiger bunch are, you are just a lot of echoes."

"Didn't know it before, lass."

"Well, you are. One day I asked Butterfly how he felt; it was just after you were pulling round after the last operation, and we all knew you were out of danger, and he said: 'Me? Nothin' to write home ter mother about me, now I know old Snowey's on the mend,' and it was very nearly the same with the Sergeant; the young doctor greeted him one morning with: 'How are you feeling?' and the Englishman looked up from his pillow and said: 'Never mind *me;* how are my mates?'"

Snowey produced the old twisted smile the girl loved to see, and his voice had its old-time drollery.

"Well, girlie, I shore think we were all licked into one shape by th' Old Tiger; men couldn't campaign an' work an' travel with him f'r years, an' not grow human, he's just th' best ever."

"He's a man, all man, Snowey; I nearly fell in love with him when I first met him."

"Must ha' had dust in y'r eyes, Maidee, not ter make it quite instead of nearly."

"I think I should have done so if it hadn't been for Ginger."

"What had th' kid to do with that?"

"Everything to do with it. I'd feel sorry for any woman who became Mrs. McGlusky whilst Ginger was round. Why, boy, Ginger is the old digger's world."

"That made me feel sore many a time, girlie; the

rest of us had th' edges of th' Old Tiger's heart, but Ginger had th' middle."

"I know, Snowey, and the night of the fight with Rooney's gang, when they brought you all here, the doctor said after a glance at Ginger: 'Call for a volunteer to give blood to this boy, he's nearly all in, transfusion of blood and a lot of it quick is his only chance.'"

"The kid was near heaven that time, lass."

"I don't know about *heaven*," smiled Maida, "but he was just on the edge of things, and McGlusky lying on a bed near by, thrust out one of his arms and cried to the doctor: 'Blood f'r ma wee mannie? Haud y'r blether, an' tak' mine, ye half-witted gommeril, A'm stronger than a steer,' and, Snowey, the old warrior was drained nearly dry of blood himself from his wounds, and so weak he could not stand. The doctor told him so, and he cursed fierce and low, and cried: 'Tak' ma heart's blood f'r ma wee buckie.'"

"They didn't take it, Maidee?"

"No; he had none to spare."

"Some one must ha' volunteered."

"Yes," said the girl, "there was a volunteer, and Ginger got blood for his veins just in time—only just, boy."

"I'll find that chap soon as I get well, an' say thank you f'r that, an'—an' find out if he wants any dough; lots of good fellows are broke, you know—what was his name, Maidee?"

"He didn't give his name, boy."

"Do—you—know his name?" Snowey's eyes caught and held the girl's until with a blush she turned her

head away. "Needn't bother to tell me, girlie, I know the name."

He caressed her with his eyes. After a time the chuckle that used to run about in his throat, as Butterfly described it, caught her ear.

"That does me good, boy."

"It shore does make me feel gleeful, Maidee, to know you gave your blood to save Ginger; you're one of the Tiger crowd now."

"Well, there will soon be another."

"You've got me guessin', little maid."

"I mean Annie Laurie."

"Say, I'll never forget th' way that girl ran an' tried to tie up Ginger's wounds an' him down in th' roadway; they were skunks at heart, pumpin' lead at a wounded man an' a woman."

"Annie's as proud of the wound she got that night as if she had got the V.C., Snowey."

"Known many a chap get it f'r less; why, she walked into almost certain death. Must ha' loved that freckle-faced image of ours quite a lot, eh?"

"Think so, boy, eh?"

"Don't you?"

"Ginger was always a pet of Annie's, and always will be, but I know a man she thought she was in love with right up to that gun-fighting night."

"Lord—do you mean th' Old Timer? Men call him ugly, but th' old divil draws women to him like a water-melon draws a nigger."

The girl nestled her cheek against the Sharpshooter's lantern jaw.

"For a man who can see to shoot as straight as

you do, boy, you're the blindest thing I know in some ways."

"Make that speech a little clearer unless you want to be kissed—Jim Sullivan."

"Jim doesn't," mocked the girl, "but Maida Lamarde does," and, weak as he was, Snowey went through the lovers' ritual, and took a long time over it. "You didn't know Annie Laurie almost hated me once, for your sake, boy?"

"Shucks. Annie loved my dancin', not me; lots of girls get that kind o' fever for a bit when a man's step suits theirs."

"That so, boy? Then, when we are married, you dance with no one but your wife."

"Reckon you'll about fill th' bill as far as I'm concerned, honey."

"Yes; and the Sergeant will fill the bill as far as Annie Laurie is concerned, laddie."

"Is *that* how th' horses are runnin', Maidee?"

"Yes; when she saw the Englishman fighting, I think she found out where her heart really was; she's English, you know, and I expect it was the call of the blood after all—can't blame them, can we?"

"They're two of the best; she worked like a brick f'r her livin' an' walked as straight as a die, an' as f'r him—well, we know th' Sergeant."

"Snowey——"

"Well, Maidee?"

"Let us clean everything up now once and for all."

"Bring y'r broom."

"I—I think the Sergeant had illusions up to that night too."

"Meanin' you?"

"He thought he wanted me."

"I thought so too."

"She's a finer girl than I am, boy."

"She is—f'r him."

"They are going home to 'Blighty,' as the Sergeant calls it, as soon as they're married; they talk all day about the fields of Kent, the garden of England, that's where Annie comes from."

"Prettiest place I know," agreed Snowey. "I'll take you there some day—don't know a nicer place f'r a honeymoon trip, girlie. One thing, the Sergeant will take back gold enough to buy up a good slice of it, guess they'll want ter make him a General when they see his bank-roll."

"I wish I could fix up a wedding for Butterfly, he's a dear."

"Have a shy at it while th' complaint's ragin', most things are catchin'."

"I did," grumbled Maida; "I—I introduced him to an awful nice girl, a nurse, but——"

"Didn't bite, eh?"

"Bite? He didn't even kiss her, and I'm sure I left them alone enough."

"Butterfly *is* slow in some things."

"Slow—he's—he's a hearse."

"Perhaps he wanted enlightenin' on th' situation."

"Well, I enlightened him."

"Did you, girlie? What line o' defence did he take up?"

"He looked at me as simple as a child, and he

said: 'Thanks, Miss Maida, I'll write home ter mother about it.'"

Snowey chuckled gleefully.

"Old Butterfly ain't so slow after all, girlie."

The winter passed; the summer came and had nearly worn itself out, and Canvas Town was full of revelry once more, for two of the far-famed Tiger crowd had married that day, and McGlusky had taken the town under his wing. He spent his money like a baron of old.

Before the wedding ceremony he laid the foundation-stone of a hospital for children, and handed the Warden of the fields a cheque for the completion thereof, which the Possum said was as big as a blanket. At noon he and Ginger together did the same office jointly in regard to a college for the training of Anzac singers, in memory of the Irish lad's lost voice, Ginger remarking—

"Be me soul, sorr, perhaps th' singin' voice Oi mislaid just here wid th' help av Rooney's gun, may come back ter some Anzac kiddie; if ut does, sorr, Oi'll be happy."

"Dinna mak' ma greet, wee mannie. A'm hopin' ta meet th' voice ye lost oop yonner; A'm theenkin' th' old grey gods air mindin' it—dom Rooney an' dom th' bones an' th' evil speerit o' him, he were just a killer, th' blastie."

The Sergeant had purchased a tract of country which he gave for a home for women, and Butterfly's cheque made the building of a home there a certainty. Men wondered that Snowey, who had done so well on the

field, appeared in none of these gifts, but a week after he and his bride had left, it transpired that he had left the money for the erection of a wonderful amphitheatre, such as he had seen at Verona when serving with Signor McGlusky in Italy.

"'Teach th' kiddies who come after us how to fight," he had said to the Warden, "for some day the Anzac lands will need 'em."

So each had done after his kind for the place that had made them "gold kings."

The farewell dinner to brides and grooms took place in the big dining-room of the Crab-apple. Snowey sat next to Maida, who was Maida Lamarde no longer, and Annie Laurie sat beside the Sergeant, her husband, and the rest of the Tiger crowd were grouped near, whilst the rest of the room was thronged. The dinner came to an end, toasts were drunk, and songs were sung, and then McGlusky rose from his place and beckoned to some one at the door of the private dining-room which all remembered so well. In response to the veteran's signal, two stalwart African negroes approached, each bearing an immense silver dish with a silver cover on top; they laid one in front of Maida and Snowey, the other in front of the Sergeant and his bonny English bride. All craned forward to see what novelty the old digger had furnished to finish the feast. McGlusky raised the immense covers, one in each hand, and a roar went up as two beautiful cradles wrought from pure silver stood revealed. Annie and Maida, blushing and laughing, clung to their husbands' arms. When the noise died down, McGlusky spoke—

"Th' siller f'r the cradles cam' frae th' Broken

Hill mines, where ye once wrought f'r a daily wage, Snowey."

"Hard work an' good wages I had there, Old Sportsman."

The dainty bedding in the cradles began to move.

"He's given you a family to start with, boys," yelled a digger far down the table.

"Aye, have A—tiger's cubs f'r twa Tigers," yelled McGlusky, and tearing aside the dainty linen, the big man seized and held at arm's length a pair of beautifully striped tiger-cubs bought in the Zoo. The brides shrank back from the spitting, snarling babes o' the jungle, but Snowey and the Sergeant rose, and, reaching out their hands, took the quaint gifts and held them aloft, whilst the brides took the silver cradles.

A great laugh filled the room; then Ginger, leaping on a chair, placed one hand on the veteran's shoulder, and in an ecstasy of delight, forgetful of Rooney's bullet, opened his mouth to sing as of old, and to the amazement of all who knew the great specialist's verdict, the melody poured forth richer, purer, sweeter than of old, and Ginger sang a song of his own composing—

> "The Tiger Flag that yet shall be
> The emblem of the Anzac breed,
> To float o'er land and sea,
> The Tiger Flag, the Tiger Flag,
> The emblem of the brave and free."

As Ginger sang his chorus, the whole company joined in, and every man and woman was wildly waving a little black and gold striped banner, and as the song

ceased Snowey, eyes blazing, hands outflung, leapt upon the table, and his voice rang out vibrant as a clarion call to battle—

"Three cheers for our Tribune—the Tribune yet to be—McGlusky!"

THE END

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